

Gypsies, nomads, pirates and Indians: counter culture, revolution  
and the movement of movements

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*For H.*



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## Summary

This thesis is geared towards assessing the role(s) ('positive', 'negative', etc.) of certain cultural 'codes' in the constitution of oppositional social movements – including (but not limited to) codes associated with “counter culture”. In orienting itself as such, it takes as its starting point certain social movement discourses, asking whether they are not bound up in dissonances arising from the contestation of such cultural codes.

More precisely, it observes that across multiple regional nodes of the 'movement of movements' in the global North – and particularly in those nodes continuous with anarchist, non-Leninist Marxist, and direct action-oriented political traditions – intense dialogues have occurred since the late 1990s as to questions of movement strategy and orientation. Although they take apparently disparate forms – around questions of “actionism” and activist ghettoisation; of “lifestylism”; of “summit-hopping”, etc. – this paper views these dialogues as fundamentally interlinked, and seeks to explore this linkage in terms of contradictions deeply rooted in the long-term evolution of the movements – and in terms of movement actors' struggles with those contradictions. Ultimately, the thesis casts many of the contentious issues at the centre of intra-movement dialogues as arising from the contradictions of the movements' 'counter cultural' heritage.

Having considered the problems associated with this heritage, and the reaction against it on the part of movement actors, the thesis goes on to ask whether counter culture, understood as one element of a broad libertarian drift within popular culture, could not *also* be seen as an important toolbox for oppositional movements to draw upon: as a matrix not just for what is still meaningful in flawed and taken-for-granted notions of 'class struggle', but also (drawing on the work of certain anarchist and autonomist writers) for the actualisation of ubiquitous human potentialities toward freedom and “self-valorisation”.



As a pilot exercise in testing these questions out empirically, the thesis analyses data drawn from interviews with young newcomers to oppositional social movements in Ireland, asking how their paths to participation may have been influenced by antagonistic cultural codes.

## Introduction

Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber points out the danger of thinking that the world changes every time you get a new idea – “the sort of basic intellectual mistake developmental psychologists say we’re meant to get over in early childhood, but it seems few of us really do” (Graeber 2004:43). On the other hand, sometimes it can take a bit of reflection, and a bit of a step back, to figure out all the contours of what is really going on. Graeber (2004:12) highlights the task of radical intellectuals to “tease out the hidden... logics” underlying people’s actions – particularly in the context of attempts to create alternatives – “try to figure out the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back”.

And while it would be ridiculous for me to think that I am sitting here on a great barrel of knowledge, ready to crack open and change the way that it is possible to think about prospects of revolution, I do present this thesis in the conviction that there are things going on under the noses of contemporary social movements that remain to be effectively theorised, or understood; and that if this were to happen, it would be to the service of mounting a challenge to the system in which humanity is ensnared, and furthermore to the cause of building a democratic and egalitarian society in its place.

I started the thesis with this conviction, and it has grown stronger as the project has progressed. That initial impetus was as much geared towards making sense of my own thought processes as the processes I saw around me. Participation in oppositional social movements has been a constant of my adult life (albeit this is not a long time – while I am not entirely sure I feel comfortable calling myself an adult!), but this has been a topsy-turvy ride. Looking back on the ways that my ‘social-movements-rationality’ has realigned and reinvented itself over time, it seems to me this trajectory says something about the issues around which current social movements dialectics oscillate. From my recollections of sitting on a ferry to a continental summit protest in summer 2003 and declaring that the difference between “us” and the likes of the Socialist Workers Party was that they were just about politics, and “we” were about a whole way of life, to

renouncing all that stuff and lampooning activist “lifestylism” for excluding “normal”, “working class” people, and cutting my hair – all of this reflected things that were going on just under the surface of the movements I have been involved in: things that are issues now as much as ever.

These issues are simultaneously obvious and elusive. Take some keywords from this thesis, take a random selection of social movement participants in Ireland (or in many other places), push their buttons, sit back, and watch the discourse flow. This is the obvious bit. The elusive aspect of all this lies in the degree to which all of these issues are mired up in implicit, fragmentary, commonsense knowledge frameworks, which to a large extent have proved immune to theorisation. It is my conviction that these bodies of knowledge, and bids by radical intellectuals to understand their social movement contexts, have passed like ships in the night.

There is an ocean of dissonances, tensions and complexes out there, in whose midst we are so used to working, that they resemble wallpaper, or the background soundtrack to our political lives. Sometimes the tips of these icebergs are obvious enough that they attract attention; but I am convinced that the underwater 'mountain range' that these 'bergs' make up remains quite neglected. This thesis is my attempt, for the moment, to take a dive and swim around the submerged formations, and see what I can see.

In chapter one I try to outline how omnipresent, and how interconnected, the issues that make up these hulks are. I try to sketch a picture of the mess of dissonances, tensions, complexes that structure so much of life in social movements – a task that is a central hinge of my project, and one that I embrace with some difficulty. It is now tempting to go back and rewrite the chapter, incorporating into it the additional data I have picked up along the way of my research, as well as data that never quite made it into the original draft for no particularly good reason (other than the mundane pressures of struggling to write a tricky academic piece in some kind of coherent manner, and being terrified of doing anything to upset the delicate momentum one has hit upon in the process).

But it is probably wiser to dump any such data here – doing what I can to extract any potential it holds for locating the usefulness of this thesis – and to leave the main body of the thesis as it is.

As I said, sometimes the tips of the chain of icebergs I am concerned with garner attention. Sometimes they are even in sufficient quantity and proximity that they evoke a sense of the larger issues – but still, getting to the roots of these is elusive. For instance, two papers (excluding my own!) presented to the 2007 installment of Manchester Metropolitan University's annual Alternative Futures and Popular Protest conference (about as close an institutional reference point as possible for this thesis) connected quite directly to issues central to my thesis: those of Barr and Drury, and Papadimitriou.<sup>1</sup> However, at the risk of sounding arrogant, I would suggest that both are more caught up in the web of dissonances surrounding these issues, than actively stepping back from them, and surveying the web.

In their paper “‘Activist’ identity as a motivational resource: Dynamics of (dis) empowerment at the G8 direct actions, Gleneagles, 2005” (2007), Barr and Drury utilise a social-psychological approach to show that a well-developed sense of ‘activist’ identity was an aid to many protesters at the Scotland G8 – qualifying this to point out that the degree of affinity felt by some protesters around this shared identity seems to have had a disturbing mirror image in the sense of alienation felt by protesters who were not privy to such an identification. Thus, Barr and Drury see the ‘activist’ identity as a double-edged sword: a source of motivation for some protesters, crucially enabling them to put not-unambiguously successful protest endeavours into some kind of perspective – “e.g. ‘just one battle in a wider war’” (Barr and Drury 2007:2) – while also threatening to put a “break on escalation” (Barr and Drury 2007:2) in some contexts, potentially entailing “a retreat into lifestylism or an activist ghetto, cementing rather than challenging the disunity observed at Gleneagles between the different protest groups” (Barr and Drury 2007:3).

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In providing some empirical confirmation of some issues already widely thought to exist in the context of 'activism' debates, such insights are not without their usefulness. But there are many questions on this landscape that such a study can say little about. Is the motivation provided by the 'activist' identity beneficial in a 'Durkheim's-theory-of-religion' sort of a way, for example? Or in more of a “pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will” sort of a way?

Is it a sort of opium for the senses, the way that, centuries ago, millenarian movements often leaned on notions of judgement day and mystical processes that would ensure their success in the long run? – a trend with Gramsci connected to the quasi-religious faith in the 'iron laws of history' found in the context of the early workers movement, in the era of Marxism (Kolakowski 1978:232).

Actually, the anti-intellectualism often found in the context of 'activist' identities has been much commented on (see Anonymous 2000a, 2000b; Featherstone *et al* 2004), and is seen by many as being conducive to a belief in the power of 'activism' at all costs, as an end in itself even. On an individual level, this often leads to collapse and burn-out, as, after a 'career' defined by an unswerving faith in 'activism', people *lose* the faith.<sup>2</sup> Lacking any coherent analysis of how the system works, these people often drop out of any kind of collective action, and go off to live in the country and grow organic vegetables. This, of course, is to speak of one kind of 'activist'; in a sense, the kind of 'activist' spoken of, I think, by Barr and Drury. Other kinds of 'activists' – often people less likely to rejoice in the 'activist' identity dealt with by Barr and Drury – sometimes possess other kinds of abilities to stay motivated in terms of collective action. Embracing something like what (I think) Gramsci meant by the “pessimism of the intelligence”, for these people, the possession of some kind of analysis of how the system works – however right or wrong – can provide an armour against despair that reliance on, say, a moral critique of capitalism, does not always provide.

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2 This phenomenon of 'activist' burnout is alluded to, for example, in the “Down With Empire, Up With Spring” section of the final edition of the massively influential Earth First! Journal, *Do Or Die*.

These, I think, are crucial and pressing issues, which, among others, I try to discuss in this thesis. But I am not so sure if Barr and Drury's study pushes forward very far in addressing them. Papadimitriou's paper, on the other hand, not only fails to step back and appreciate the complexity of the web of issues at hand, but becomes more entangled in it in trying to move forward. With a case study of the 2005 G8 protests to the foreground, Papadimitriou critiques the "autonomism" implicated in the "Global Justice Movement". While paying lipservice to its ability to create effective and impressive autonomous spaces run on "horizontal" lines – such as the anti-G8 protest camp cum 'eco-village' called "Hori-Zone" set up outside the town of Stirling for the duration of the protests – he also identifies in this world a "fetishisation of process", limiting the movement's ultimate ability to work strategically and programatically towards – or even to identify – its crucial ends. Also picked out for criticism is the "autonomous" movement's refusal to engage with what are seen as the apparatuses of power, whether state, corporate, or whatever – being preoccupied instead with building the kernels of a new society in the cracks of the current one: spaces which would form the matrix for new collectivities entailing personal affinity and intimacy, and new kinds of human relationships, networked together in horizontal, de-centred ways. Papadimitriou sees this orientation with building new ways of life as being at cross-purposes with the task of relating the movement's struggles to the concerns of the "wider society", and building a truly formidable force for change.

Of course, much of this sounds not too dissimilar, in its general outlines, to old-school left critiques of anarchist praxis, albeit tarted up to suit the mood of the early twenty-first century. And on these terms, a counter-argument could easily be offered: that if people sometimes go overboard in "fetishising process", it is rather understandable as part of the reaction to the experience of Jacobin and Bolshevik subordinations of means to ends, which have tended to lead to disaster for humanity; that traditions of refusing to pursue the capture of state power have been vindicated by history, with institutions such as the state being designed for domination, not emancipation (reflected in the recent gravitation of non-anarchists towards this very anarchic anti-power stance); and that a challenge to the status quo that focuses only on *structure* – on politics and economics – and not, to

some degree or another, on transforming everyday existence in the here and now, is not much of a challenge.

Perhaps the author even saw it in these terms, privately – as an appeal against the “anarchicisation” of the movement. It would not be surprising, considering that another author at the conference, also presenting on “Global Justice Movement” organisational praxis, felt at liberty to baldly state – yes, in the year 2007 – that “In my opinion, anarchism is a subculture”, before going on to pooh-pooh endeavours at large-scale, horizontal network organising.<sup>3</sup>

Actually, I think that this web of issues is much bigger than a staring match between anarchist tendencies and more institutional leftists and reformists. These dissonances are not just found on these interfaces, but everywhere, and all the time, within anarchist and “autonomous” spheres as much as anywhere else.

It is the tension to be seen in this aside, inscribed in a UK speaking tour report by a member of the Rosspport Solidarity Camp, one part of the anarchic wing of the local struggle against the Shell corporation in Co. Mayo, Ireland:

Then it was up to Nottingham... to speak at the International Community Centre, we stayed at the lovely Sumac centre, but couldn't speak there as that was one of the nights its' (*sic.*) bar is open. The Sumac is a very nice centre and seems properly embedded, that is, an actual community centre *as opposed to being largely sub-cultural*. (Terry – Rosspport Solidarity Camp 2005; emphasis added)

It is the tension underlying the musings of one of my informants, Stefan, on how anarchist endeavours might transcend the constituency of “white trash, middle class, sort of punk rock teenagers” to which they often seem bound – a description propounded in a

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3 The irony of all this is that while such authors are dismissing network approaches to organising – largely based on commonsense standpoints that that sort of thing is fine in a small-scale setting, much more top-down arrangements are needed to organise anything “big” – state and corporate interests are throwing a lot of “big” money at research into network organising, inspired by the new social movement struggles of the 1990s and 2000s (Bowen and Purkis 2004).

casual, matter-of-fact sort of way, reflecting a reality taken for granted (if not accepted as unproblematic) by people like Stefan, a young anarchist.

And it is the tension at the heart of a chance conversation between a handful of young Dublin-based anarchists, as recounted by one of them – another informant of mine – Diarmuid:

[...] We actually had a conversation, myself and a couple of people had a conversation about this a couple of weeks ago [...] about, how can somebody who's been living in a squat, and not worked for like twenty years, on the dole, identify with, like, workers at a picket, and go up and say "I support you", and like, "What do you do?" "I haven't worked in twenty years", and have, like, massive dreads – like, there's nothing *wrong* with expressing yourself through your clothes, or through piercings, or tatoos, or whatever, your hair, or whatever you're into, but [...] if I feel like it stands in the way of my getting my politics across to other people, or my own politics, my own analysis, just in general, then, I'll leave it behind, I won't do it, till... well, whenever point that I can... [laughs] which might never come.

[...]

That conversation was with one person from Anarchist Youth and one person from Wisum [nickname for anarchist Workers Solidarity Movement], both who dress very neutrally, and not at all like crusties, or hippies, or whatever you call it. [...] I'd said that, I'd always had this thing that if you put something before your politics, that's a bit strange, you should do it to a certain extent, but not to extremes, like right now, em... And, what one of them was saying – there was two sides – but what one of them was saying, the one from the WSM – or, sorry, they're both in the WSM, but the one who's *just* in the WSM [and not also in Anarchist Youth] was saying that, you know, these people *should* satisfy their own desires, and they should, because personal liberation is part of the revolution, blah blah blah [...]

And the person who's in Anarchist Youth *and* Wisum was saying, "Nah nah nah, you should put that aside for now, 'cause a lot of people have been taught, or whatever, that someone who dresses like that, and someone who doesn't work, is lazy, and their politics are crap, and blah blah blah. And I would agree with that to a... no, not to a certain extent actually, I *would* agree with that.



Throughout this thesis I try to trace these themes – ultimately arguing in the final chapter that perhaps the most useful way to view them is as an enduring conflict between countervailing orientations toward *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* found within movements for social transformation. 'Fundamentalisms' on both sides throw up serious, and even crippling problems, for that end of social transformation to be realised. The task, then, would seem to be how we can possibly manage to balance the two in the struggle for human emancipation.

## Chapter one: Problems of 'activism' and counter culture

### **Introduction: July 1st, 2005 (5 days before the 2005 G8 summit)**

A bus. Destination: a summit protest. A road, somewhere between Dublin and Belfast. Or are we across the water in Scotland already? Grogginess and anticipation. For some of the uninitiated (including kids of school-going age who, as far as their parents are concerned, are definitely not meant to be here), that means wild excitement. To those inured to this sort of thing – whose experience, maybe since their late teens, through student groups or whatever, has involved socialisation into the transitory other-place of the protest-bus – it's less wild excitement and more a vibe of "here we go again" - in all such a vibe's ambiguity. There are the negative associations and there are the positive ones. Shooting the breeze. Dialectics. Discomfort. Having the craic. Nursing the injuries, emotional and physical.

But veteran or newcomer, the Irish anarchist army is on the march! Well, a section of the Irish anarchist army anyways. It must be said that there are absent parties. Even certain parties who would be no strangers to the summit-hopping game. Hmm...

A text. People are talking about a text. What text? Did I get it? A mass SMS has been circulating and it's the talk of the bus. There's confusion about whom it originated from. Telling people not to go to Scotland for the summit: that things are kicking off in County Mayo (where locals have been struggling against a rapacious, Niger Delta-esque gas development being pushed through by a Shell-led energy consortium, and by the Irish state); that five of the local dudes are being banged up in jail. That there's no point running off to prop up the ritualised media spectacle that this G8 summit and the mobilisation against it represent – maybe no point at all, but definitely not if it means skipping off when *real* people in a *real* community struggle are coming under the cosh of the state and of their corporate mates, and when they need support from anyone who's up

for a fight, like, with the power. Within the enforced brevity of 160 characters, anyway, this is the gist.

Whoops! There's that real world again – the real world of being political, where you have to make real choices about what to give your time and energy to. Activist intellectuals and sympathetic academics write fancy books that would make you think going to an international summit protest was an uncomplicated step in the direction of 'anti-power', doing the job of 'alternative globalisation' by itself. Off the page, things are messier.

So, things are complicated. Tactical, practical choices. Am I more useful at a summit protest in Scotland – fighting out my politics on a global stage – or am I more useful taking action in solidarity with a community-based anti-corporate campaign back in Eire? A practical question, to be sure; and one which has caused a number of last-minute cancellations on this bus, as people decided to divert their energies elsewhere. Other people had similar dilemmas but stuck with the summit-trip; however they don't all look too sure about their decision.

But wait – there are more layers to this than might immediately meet the eye. There's another communication from someone off the bus; it's in relation to the aforementioned text. Someone's distancing themselves from that text – they want people to know they weren't behind it – that they're not telling people en masse not to go to Scotland. This message is coming from Harry, who's been central to the bridge-building process going on between the “activist” milieu of the nation's libertarian left, and the Mayo community campaign in question. Harry had this campaign figured as something to put energy into before pretty much anyone else's personal-political radars had been troubled by it. Coupled with a reputation as a (Genoa-'veteran'-turned) summit-protest sceptic, it's easy enough to imagine that when Harry heard about the widely-circulating text imploring people not to go to Scotland, he might have worried that people would point the finger at him. Or at least, it's easy to imagine when you factor in some paranoia.

Of course this is not just about practicalities. (Is anything?) There is a context to this incident; the reasons why an apparently trivial non-episode surrounding a text message has much deeper resonances for many people on the bus, whether these meanings are verbalised or not. And as logic would have it, this is connected to the reasons why many of the generation of Irish libertarians and anti-authoritarians who made the bloody trip to Genoa in 2001 are not on this rather shorter G8 excursion to Scotland four summers later. And it is the matrix for such discourses as exemplified by this online contribution, posted after the G8 in Scotland by a member of one of the few formally organised Irish anarchist organisations ('Organise!'). (Bluntly pointing toward the nature of such discourses in question, the post is entitled "Class Struggle Versus Summit Protests".)

The reason that those of us who did get involved in radical politics through summit protests did so was because there was no other point of entry into radical politics. Simply because some of us got involved through that kind of protest, doesn't mean that new people necessarily should if we can develop more effective political alternatives on their doorstep. Perhaps, instead of getting people involved in solid class politics by first sucking them in through dead-end activism, we should just try and create better entry points for solid class politics! (Sacha 2005)

The basic point that "Sacha" is concerned with making is fairly clear: that "summit-hopping", as it's known, is, in terms of political strategy, not where it's at. But Sacha's words are part of a relatively well-established discourse within a certain political sphere; so a little more dissection and we can discern a little more about the architecture of this discourse, and of its bridges and interfaces with other discourses. When Sacha equates summit protests with "dead-end activism", his choice of words is significant. If we were to try and articulate this written utterance to the cadence of the spoken word, the stress would not fall on the "dead-end" part – Sacha would not be talking about "dead-end activism" – it would fall on the "activism": "dead-end activism". In other words, the main problem isn't that this particular type of activism is dead-end, it's that it's activism at all. For in certain political orbits – intersecting across various continents – "activism" itself has become something of a dirty word, and where it's not a dirty word, the concept is divisive and controversial, and layered in ambiguity. Thus, debates about the merits of

summit-hopping as against other strategic choices are rather inseparable from other, broader scapes of debate – scapes on which summit-hopping represents just one manifestation of what might be called the “activism” problem.

### **The trouble with “activism”**

So what's so wrong with activism? Actually, this is where things start to get a bit complicated. Reflecting a trend visible across multiple regional nodes of the “movement of movements” in the global North – and particularly across those nodes continuous with anarchist, non-Leninist Marxist, and direct action-oriented political traditions – much of the time and for many people within the libertarian wing of this global movement's Irish section<sup>4</sup> (the context with which I am personally familiar, and towards which my analysis is biased), the terms 'activist' and 'activism' are widely and casually used; however, the degree of ire incited by such terms *the rest of the time*, and for *some of the other people* – or, even, for some of the same people but when the mood or the context is different – might give one the impression that a fairly well-developed repertoire of critiques, conceptual tools and literature exists on the critical side of the activist divide. In fact, as far as literature goes, I can only think of a handful of influential writings on the subject (see for example Anonymous (2000), and Featherstone *et al*, discussed below). The writings I am aware of – ones that have been disseminated and debated formally and informally within social movement milieux<sup>5</sup> – are from disparate sources within the global anti-authoritarian left, and beyond having 'activism' as their subject matter, could largely be said to pass each other by like ships in the theoretical night. Nor do they

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4 For outlines of this movement's formation, composition, and relationship to other nodes of the “movement of movements”, see Cox (2006b), and (briefly) Dunne (2006).

5 To give but a handful examples, Featherstone's (*et al* 2004) text was included in a session of the Dublin Anarchist Reading Group in late 2006, and a workshop around the “Give Up Activism” article (Anonymous 2000a) was included in the schedule for the 6<sup>th</sup> Grassroots Gathering, held in Galway in late 2003. (Although the person meant to be leading the workshop could not make it in the end, and so, to the best of my recollection, it did not go ahead. For an account of the Grassroots Gatherings – libertarian “activist” conferences of sorts – and of their significance in the crystallisation of the Irish section of the “movement of movements”, see Cox (2007).) Reflecting the international nature of these dialogues, within a year of its initial publication, the original “Give Up Activism” text had been translated into at least two different languages, and re-published in at least three different countries (Anonymous 2000a).

particularly encapsulate all the contours of 'real-life' debates on the matter. But as pointed out by a number of authors (e.g. Cox (1999:1), Barker and Cox (2002) Graeber (2004)), social movement participants 'on the ground' do not always wait for their designated 'organic intellectuals' to get around to conceptually exhausting critical issues in print before grappling with them themselves. Movement participants 'spontaneously' generate their own (often informal, but no less important for that (in terms of influence)) theory.<sup>6</sup>

So even if the poles of this dialogue are not particularly cohesive, I think it would be possible to identify a handful of key themes that tie the discourse together. An explicit and overriding concern of the "Give Up Activism" texts<sup>7</sup> (Anonymous 2000a, 2000b), for example, is the alleged ease with which social movement participants (in this case within a UK context) relate to an 'activist' identity. The author sees such behaviour patterns as highly problematic for oppositional social movements whose *raison d'être* must surely hinge on riding the currents of social struggle upon whose dialectical interplay society's 'structures' balance, and on building links across this landscape with other social actors who also stand to gain something from social transformation. Ultimately, the author accepts that for the time being, it does not seem practicable for social movement actors to jettison activities that fall under the classification of 'activism' – but, for the author, to *aspire* to transcend this role is, for radicals, an imperative, while to exist *at ease* with this role – to be content "networking", "doing campaigns", "building links" with other campaign groups, and otherwise etching out a social niche for an activist subculture to flourish within – represents something of an abdication of one's 'class struggle' sword: an accommodation with the groove well-carved out by generations of liberal, reform-oriented lobby groups – conscientious objectors to the worst excesses of the system.

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6 Obviously, in doing so they are arguably fulfilling the role of organic intellectuals (a concept deriving from Gramsci (1971)) themselves. The point is that there are very different levels of intellectual activity that could arguably be encapsulated in this bracket – from the output of those who wax theoretical on Indymedia websites, to those who give 'workshops' at movement events, to those who write books, and so forth.

7 Here I refer both to the original essay entitled "Give Up Activism" and its "postscript" – I think it would make little sense to speak of one and not the other, considering that many of the ideas brought to bear in the former are significantly drawn out, amended and recanted in the latter.

In another significant 'activism' text, Featherstone *et al* (2004) frame their discussion rather differently, this time in terms of the balance – or the need for balance – between action and reflection on the “activist left” - a typically broad euphemism for the archipelago spanning the “global justice, peace, media democracy, community organizing, financial populist and green movements”. And while the authors do not hone in on what might be called activist 'identity issues' as in the “Give Up Activism” texts, strong parallels are nonetheless present. Featherstone *et al* document the drift of oppositional social movements away from the valorization of analysis and intellectual rigour in favour of an obsession with “action”. Amidst this anti-intellectualism, one can make out what we might call the counter culture problem coming into focus; the same problem lying in the background to the “Give Up Activism” analysis.

### **The counter culture problem**

Elsewhere, in a spirit of criticism towards some of the existing literature tying together notions of social movements and of counter culture, I made an extremely tentative and cursory sketch of how I thought we might better get to grips with such subject matter. While agreeing with Cox's (1999) notion that the concept of counter culture is crucial in attempting to think through questions of contemporary social movements and social transformation, I suggested that some spheres of what is sometimes called counter culture in fact have little to do with opposition to capitalist hegemony. I took a leaf from Hal Draper's (1966) book to suggest that we might be able to speak of the “two souls of counter-culture” as he spoke of the “two souls of socialism”, in so doing drawing a line between such cultural formations that are “‘counter' in the sense of presenting an 'alternative'... a space where those who wish to opt out of mainstream culture may choose to go”, and that which is “‘counter' in the sense of being 'against'... That is, actively and aggressively opposed to the status quo, which it seeks to challenge, confront and ultimately play a part in defeating...” (Davis 2006).

In fact, such an approach would be inadequate to address the layered complexity of the counter-culture problem that consideration of the above 'activism' texts starts to uncover. If the counter-culture problematic is a wave, then in the 'activist' worlds covered in these texts we find examples of formations that are riding its crest. However, what is problematic is not necessarily these formations' apoliticism as such: what they are 'counter' to, they indeed are often 'against'. But before exploring what the 'activism' texts say about the counter-culture problem – or even explaining how they have anything to do with the subject of counter-culture in the first place – it is necessary to take a step backwards, and take a look at how the counter-culture problem developed; to historicise it.

### **Historicising the problem: Culture and revolution**

The term 'counter culture' – suffice here to say, denoting a movement or dynamic of cultural innovation unfolding in some sort of dialogue with an oppositional politics – represents an inheritance from the end of the 1960s, and from the period of hegemonic crisis characterised by Katsiaficas (writing in 1987) as the most recent of the “world historical movements”. And it is a peculiarly contested inheritance at that. Since its popularisation from Roszak's usage in 1970, it has routinely been celebrated, reviled, declared dead – or just out of fashion (McKay 1996) – and revived. Moreover its detractors have as often located themselves on the left of the political spectrum as anywhere else.

Of course, the idea that such an intertwining of 'culture' and 'politics' would be so contentious amongst radicals or would-be radicals raises some questions. To think of the two concepts in tandem is hardly an innovation of the 1960s: central to Marx's legacy may be his association with the theoretical subordination of culture to political economy through the base-superstructure model; but yet he was capable of identifying the need for an evolutionary process, in terms of culture and consciousness, amongst the social actors charged with the historical task of bringing about a post-capitalist society:



... we say to the workers: 'You will have to go through ten or twenty or fifty years of civil wars and international wars, not only in order to change extant conditions, but also in order to render yourselves fit for political dominion'... (Draper 1966).

While some decades later (albeit in writings that would not become influential in Italy for some years to come, or outside Italy for some decades), Gramsci (1971) was engaged (amongst other things) in updating Marx and Engels' (see e.g. 1998) analysis of the relationship between ruling classes and "ruling ideas"; in the process, imagining a 'war of position' whereby a revolutionary class formation led by the proletariat would contest the bourgeoisie's 'hegemony' over the shape of cultural and intellectual life and of civil society in general.<sup>8</sup> Thinking towards a counter-hegemonic proletarian culture, then, was a key preoccupation for Gramsci.

So why has the cultural dissonance associated with the counter culture phenomenon – a cultural moment coinciding and overlapping with the intercontinental upswing of grassroots, left-leaning social movements – been received so ambiguously over the years, not least amongst actors ostensibly on the left, or even the revolutionary left? Actually, attempting to approach such a question in any serious way presents immediate difficulties. Broadly speaking, one problem is the sheer vastness and heterogeneity of the field of human activities and dispositions to which the terminology of counter culture has been applied, reflecting the slippery nature of the term itself; a term whose conceptual content has never been nailed down with any kind of consensus (Cox 1999). It is difficult, then, to explain why something has been received ambiguously if one is not quite sure what all of that 'something' entails.

More specifically, for a cultural-political moment responsible for shaping as much of life in the ensuing decades as it did, and which has generated such a voluminous literature

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8 Of course, this is to focus on the more cultural and intellectual dimensions of Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as opposed to the more 'practical' ones, in the directive power of ruling classes over everyday social activities, not least work (Cox 2006a). There is an argument, of course, that these cultural and intellectual dimensions are often overstated, to the cost of paying sufficient attention to the 'practical' ones.

(academic and otherwise), Cox (1999) points out that many of what might be considered the rather important dots on this vista have never really been systematically joined up by would-be researchers. Cox points out that while the relationship of counter cultural dynamics to the renaissance of a 'new' left and subsequently 'new' social movements around the developments of "1968"<sup>9</sup> is routinely acknowledged in the literature, such acknowledgment tends to be the stuff of passing reference in introductions and conclusions, and rarely at the heart of the analysis. Thus, the fact of the relationship between the 'cultural' and 'political' moments surrounding the 1968 watershed – for better or for worse – seems to have bypassed the terrain of systematic analysis while going on to embed itself in a certain domain of commonsense historical understandings nonetheless. (And as Bourdieu (1988:xii-xiii) points out, academics and social scientists are anything but immune to reliance on pedestrian and commonsense understandings of social 'facts'.)

I would suggest that my difficulties in approaching the question of counter culture's ambiguous role in interpretations of post-"1968" social change run parallel to this. In the course of writing this piece, I have found the process of articulating *my own* 'commonsense' understandings on this subject to the needs of an academic thesis to be fraught with difficulty. Elsewhere, I have felt able to write (referring to the upheavals around 1968):

Dialogues have existed since this time between movements focused on alternative ways of living, and, as it were, 'Social Movements' with capital letters. As the gap has widened between the interests of actors concerned primarily with 'politics' on the one hand and 'lifestyle' on the other, these dialogues have often become fraught. The more 'old left' offspring of the New Left – e.g. Leninist and Trotskyist groups – have

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9 Following Cox (2002), I place 1968 in inverted commas; this is not simply 1968 the year, but the "1968" that symbolizes everything that was revolutionary, broad-based and grassroots about the upheavals at the end of the 1960s, and which reached their global high point in that year. Cox also speaks of "1967" as the more 'cultural' dimension to this moment, emphasising the critique of everyday 'routine' as opposed merely to 'structure', and "1969", as the aftermath of "1968"'s 'war of movement', dominated by the competition of 'radical' and 'reformist' elements coming out of "1968" for the political and social movement spoils of that moment. However, I deviate somewhat from Cox's usage in this thesis, as I also use "1968" more loosely as a metaphor for both the 'war of movement' and the 'cultural revolution' of "1967". I can only hope that this is not too confusing.

tended to keep their distance, attacking the supposed individualism and self-indulgence of the 'lifestylers'. Through protest-camping, squatting, underground music, food politics, abstention from work, and other activities, relations have often been closer between 'lifestyle' elements and libertarian, autonomist and environmentalist offspring of the New Left. But even in these spheres, major tensions have existed, and continue to exist. (Davis 2006)

But this is “the stuff of passing reference in introductions and conclusions”! To do what I am trying to do here – that is, to sketch *how* these faultlines and antipathies have developed – is to circle in on the subject matter of my above assertions more closely; but the search for the 'smoking gun(s)' – the key theoretical break where the “more 'old left' offspring of the New Left” rounded on all things counter cultural – is a frustrating one. Instead of weighty manifestos marking this break, I find scraps and fragments: signposts not to a decisive theoretical break but to a vague attitudinal drift, whose theoretical articulation probably never was very clearly defined or cohesive; signposts to attitudes imbricated in the commonsense frames of certain ideological archipelagos (or, sometimes, to put it more favourably, points of view installed in what Graeber (2004) might call frameworks of activist “low theory”); which, again, should not be surprising, given Cox's observation that the very question of the relationship of 'cultural' and 'political' moments around 1968 has been marked by a paucity of systematic analysis.

This is not to say that there is no theory in this area; just that it is rather fragmentary. In any case, the scraps and fragments give a flavour of the attitudinal-theoretical drift. And it must be emphasised that a key pillar of the critique of counter culture is, and always has been, articulated in class terms. In the mid-1970s, Corrigan and Frith (1976:238) – part of the CCCS cohort – were expressing a theme already in circulation when they somewhat sneeringly pointed out that

The political analysis of youth culture has been horribly confused by the development since the mid-sixties of the 'counter-culture' of bourgeois youth. Both students and hippies are the objects of a sort of analysis which is inappropriate for working class teenagers (even if the distinction between the two groups is not as absolute as some writers... have suggested)...

Indeed, a few years earlier, in 1970 – the year of the first recognised use of the term “counterculture” (in Roszak (1970)) – Irwin Silber (1970:26, quoted in Clarke *et al* 1976:68-69), in his “Marxist analysis” of what he wryly referred to as the “cultural revolution”, was busy denouncing that same 'revolution's

thinly-disguised middle class elitism, a philosophy engendered by those elements in society who can still find partial individual solutions to the realities of class oppression. The worker's tenuous hold on economic security does not permit those individual acts of self-liberation which reflect themselves in 'groovy' lifestyles...

For their part, Clarke *et al* point out the problematic nature of some of Silber's premises: his underestimation of the depth and significance of the cultural caesura spearheaded by counter culture on the one hand, and his somewhat limiting equation of working class interests with narrow economism on the other. While retaining an unremitting class focus in their analysis, and viewing counter culture as an organically middle class or petit-bourgeois phenomenon, Clarke *et al* transcend the level of analysis stopping at the equation: “counter culture=middle class/ bourgeois=not interesting for Marxist purposes”;<sup>10</sup> evidently considering that, organically bourgeois or not, the counter culture phenomenon may just have been significant enough in terms of the social totality to warrant its exploration (rather than just sizing it up with a view to dismissing it, that is) – and in terms both of base and of superstructure – Clarke *et al* identify a number of salient features giving shape to counter culture. Central in this analysis is its adaptive dimension – its acute tendency towards incorporation into the capitalist totality. For Clarke *et al*, there is nothing accidental about this; indeed, in what seems to me a slice of unreconstructed Marxian economic determinism, Clarke *et al* view the counter cultural wave as doing nothing other than filling a vacuum in the contemporary social formation; fulfilling the requirement of contemporary capitalism to drag cultural – and thereby economic – behaviour patterns into line with the changing needs of an economic infrastructure that has outgrown the forms of its superstructure – in particular the cultural and ideological ones. Again they quote Silber (1970:11 in Clarke *et al* 1976:65):

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10 A leap that subsequent critics of counter culture might have done well to take note of.

One of the main functions of radical upheavals... is to engender the new ideas, techniques, attitudes and values which a developing society requires but which the proprietors of its superstructure are unable to bring into being themselves because their social position is inevitably tied to the *status quo*.

In this case, the new traits required are ones tailored to a 'post-Protestant ethic' "advanced capitalism" – the transition that would later be dubbed (amongst many other euphemisms) that from "organised" mid-twentieth century to "disorganised" late twentieth century (and beyond) capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987; Offe 1984; see Cox 1999:17). These traits would include an evolution in consciousness to facilitate the new tempo of consumerism and commodity fetishism needed to sustain a changing and expanding mode of production:

Advanced capitalism now required not thrift but consumption; not sobriety but style; not postponed gratifications but immediate satisfaction of needs; not goods that last but things that are expendable: the 'swinging' rather than the sober life-style (Clarke *et al* 1976:64).

Counter culture was to play a vanguard role in this transition by "pioneering and experimenting with new social forms which ultimately gave it [the system] more flexibility" (Clarke *et al* 1976:66). Highlighting themes to be explored in more depth some years later by McRobbie (also affiliated to the CCCS), Clarke *et al* consider the dynamic inclinations toward grassroots innovation in style and lifestyle, and towards related patterns of entrepreneurship, on the counter cultural landscape; qualities which would prove ripe for incorporation:

In many aspects, the revolutions in 'life-style' were a pure, simple, raging, commercial success. In clothes, and styles, the counter-culture explored, in its small scale 'artisan' and vanguard capitalist forms of production and distribution, shifts in taste which the mass consumption chain-stores were too cumbersome, inflexible and over-capitalised to exploit. When the trends settled down, the big commercial battalions moved in and mopped up (*Ibid.*).

Ditto for music – a theme explored in more depth by Storey (1998), in relation to the counter cultural arc surrounding the West Coast rock scene in the US from the mid-sixties. Thus, a key pillar of the critique of counter culture – alternately its vulnerability, or perhaps inclination, towards incorporation – stands tall amidst the fragmentary theoretical landscape.

In counter culture, Clarke *et al* identify various other values profoundly recuperable to the changing protocols of a hegemonic order in a state of transition; describing the changes on the field of social contestation – the battleground for social movements from above and below – Cox (1999:17), with the benefit of greater hindsight, captures something of the changing dynamic of this period, vis-a-vis somewhat more 'political' concerns:

... the “politics of closure” of organised capitalism, within which both movements from below and those from above mobilised in authoritarian ways around (would-be) taken-for-granted cultural understandings of what constituted meaningful goals, ran into deep crisis in the 1960s in particular... Since that point, movements from above and below are replacing these strategies with what Magnusson (1996) has called the “flexible specialisation” of grassroots campaigners as much as of managerial restructuring, in both cases geared to a “politics of openness” which adopts a rhetoric of libertarian ideals and a critique of taken-for-granted cultural routines. As in organised capitalism, however, the key point at issue is *how far* the openness and cultural critique... should be taken: in particular, whether it is to maintain, create or undermine relationships of domination and exploitation.

This sketch helps contextualise the recuperability of certain aspects of counter culture as highlighted by Clarke *et al*: its “mystical-Utopian” and “quasi-religious” dimensions, which dovetailed with an “anti-scientific” sensibility of sometimes “mindless” proportions, and a tendency to be “over-ideological” – in the sense of declaring that “revolution is in the mind”, that “Woodstock is 'a nation'”, or that, in Jerry Rubin's words, “people should do whatever the fuck they want”, and so on; all in all, harking back to a bourgeois hyper-individualism of a most reactionary kind (Clarke *et al* 1976:67), and eventually becoming very comfortably incorporated into the popular

cultural and hegemonic forms of the late twentieth century and beyond; an era when in many aspects, prevailing orthodoxies came to announce that notions of collectively organising for fundamental changes in the structures of society were quaint and misconceived – throwbacks to the Jurassic era of modern thought – and that, as all the hip, worldly and enlightened people knew, personal fulfillment could only really be achieved on an individual level – presumably through the optimisation of personal consumption strategies. In particular, the elaboration of such orthodoxies was mirrored with similar conviction in free market and postmodernist ideologies, as Graeber (2001) points out.

Though Clarke *et al* do not use this language, I would relate their analysis here to concepts of reason and irrationalism – an explicit concern for Bookchin (1995), nearly two decades later. Framed not in the language of counter culture, but in terms of the dichotomy between countervailing “social” and “lifestyle” orientations within anarchism, Bookchin's analysis provides a window onto the damage caused by certain seeds incubated in the counter cultural moment as they germinated on the anarchist wing of the post-'68 left. In particular, we see the destruction caused by the intersection of mysticism, individualism and, of course, irrationalism.

Thus, I think it is useful to relate Bookchin's analysis of “lifestyle” anarchism to concepts of counter culture. With this in mind, we might return for a moment to one of the questions I asked at the beginning of this section: why has the linking together of oppositional politics and what might be called 'culturalism' – emphasis on the innovation and elaboration of new ways of life (the key legacy of the counter cultural moment) – proved as dramatic and contentious a development as it has? After all, thinkers from Marx to Gramsci have themselves discussed the necessity of what I consider 'counter cultural' projects of sorts?

Does the problem lie in the specific forms that counter culture has taken? Or is the problem simply a certain drift of oppositional movements from the domain of 'politics' to that of 'culture'? After all, the emergence of any culture involves, at some level, the

development of a quasi-autonomous life-world, and with life-worlds comes the dominance of 'commonsense', taken-for-granted forms of knowledge, as well as "structures of feeling"<sup>11</sup> (Williams 1965), which by definition regulate the permeability of the boundaries between one culture and another.<sup>12</sup> As Gramsci (1971) points out, commonsense knowledge is necessarily fragmentary and incoherent; so is an oppositional impulse which, around itself, spins a 'culturalist' web, doomed to beat a retreat from the domain of rationality, theory and openness to that of irrationality, incoherence and insularity? Is this the fate of social movements whose members cease to be critical actors rebelling from entrenchments within their own 'mother' society and culture, and instead set out to build alternative life-worlds parallel to them? How would Gramsci have reconciled the conflict between the dangers of 'culturalism' – including the problem of commonsense, to which he was sensitive – and the need he perceived to build a grassroots, counter-hegemonic culture?

### **The intellectual factor**

These problems will be looked at in light of other theories, and other literatures later on in this thesis. But in relation to Gramsci, the short answer to the above question, lies, I think, in what might be called the "intellectual factor". Although Gramsci never discussed such contradictions as I am concerned with here – or at least not in such terms – he was deeply concerned with questions of how commonsense and intellectual elements within a given culture might relate to one another. He considered and compared the culturally and intellectually conditioning effects of the fields of commonsense, religion, ideology and philosophy within a given social or cultural formation, and considered the social power that could be leveraged through such forms of thought; in particular, their potential purchase within hegemonic formations, and the ability of

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11 A concept whose continuing relevance, in spite of its flaws, and its abuse, is identified by Cox (1999:9-10).

12 This issue of cultural "closure" (Halfacree 1999) around social movement spheres will be examined in more depth, and with various examples, further on.



elements associated with them – often intellectual 'elites'<sup>13</sup> of sorts – to relate them to the concerns of “masses” and of “mass movements”.

While viewing “philosophy” as the only mode of thought capable of 'scientifically' and theoretically coming to terms with human experience, and identifying the inability of both commonsense and religion to address such questions in any coherent way (Gramsci 1989:122-124), Gramsci viewed with some disdain the purely philosophical-intellectual movements of history, which failed to connect to the rationalities of “simple folk” – for example, Renaissance humanism – and admired those that succeeded in establishing and sustaining close and organic connections between intellectual leadership and rank and file – for example, aspects of the Reformation, and much of the history of the Roman church; his admiration being in spite of their ultimate intellectual poverty (Gramsci 1989: 124-127).

Building on these observations – and, in line with his conception of hegemony, identifying the role of intellectuals as central to any social-cultural complex – Gramsci tried to imagine the formation of a counter-hegemonic culture that would go beyond these precedents in tying together the activity of its 'organic' intellectuals, and the experience of its rank and file members. And while Gramsci admired the 'negative' equilibrium maintained by the leadership of the Roman church, in reigning in their intellectual functionaries from transcending too far the rationalities of their flocks, he envisaged the converse dynamic in the revolutionary proletarian culture: a 'positive' equilibrium geared not only towards articulating the activity of intellectuals to the concerns of rank and file (Gramsci 1989:126), but equally geared towards 'bringing up' the intellectual level of rank and file – to anchor, in so far as possible, the new intellectual moment in the aspects of proletarian commonsense that might be called “good sense” (Gramsci 1989:124), in effect galvanising together a synthesis of philosophy and proletarian commonsense: the new cultural matrix within which, as Marx might have put it, workers and their social allies would “render yourselves fit for political

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13 I use the term 'elites' loosely to encompass the kinds of cadres of communist organic intellectuals that Gramsci might have been envisaging.

dominion” – a matrix buttressed equally in the autonomous workers education project (see Kolakowski 1978) and the workers' council (Kolakowski 1978:224).

So, the commonsense organic to the emergent counter-hegemonic culture would, all going well, be qualitatively different from any other culturally specific incarnation of commonsense there has ever been. It might be said, then, that it would not be the *politics* of Gramsci's imagined culture, but its internal *relation* between commonsense and intellectual production, that would make it a truly counter-hegemonic force. This criteria might be a useful tool in thinking about the oppositional content, or lack thereof, of counter cultural formations. Perhaps it is not just apoliticism – the kind of thing my “two souls” model was concerned with – that makes the counter cultural legacy problematic. Perhaps the key to understanding the counter culture problem is the lack of effective mechanisms regulating the equilibria between commonsense, 'on the ground' rationalities, and higher levels of intellectual production. Indeed, one could go further and identify a latent anti-intellectualism amidst the counter culture legacy.

### **Apoliticism and anti-intellectualism**

Incidences of rampant apoliticism, of course, are easier to spot. Below, Irish anarchist ex-pat Ramor Ryan describes his experience of the 2001 Rainbow Gathering in Croatia – the annual [?] event being perhaps the biggest institution on the 'hippy' wing of the counter cultural tradition, stretching back nearly thirty years. It is worth quoting Ryan at length here, simply because his words capture with richness, and up close, some of the frustrating difficulties posed by counter culture, in political terms:

In a world marked by struggle, violence, injustice and exploitation, here is the Rainbow people's response – to retreat to relative wilderness and create a utopian temporary autonomous zone based on spirituality, healing, peace and love. It's all good, except that we are three miles from the front line of the Croatian-Serbian war; less then (*sic*) ten years ago these same mountains were knee-deep in blood. The surrounding villages are pockmarked with artillery damage and bullet holes. The

Rainbow Family recognizes this by holding a “light meditation for peace” at sundown, an hour of silence and prayer. Would any of the warring parties of this conflict have joined in the light meditation for peace, I wonder – the Croatian Ustashe Nazis or the Serb Irregulars? How about the Bosnian Muslims, resident NGO, Al Qaeda? No, I don't think so (Ryan 2006:93).

... After five days I am thoroughly bored at the Rainbow Gathering, and as I wander the valley to find something to do, the smiling faces and well-wishing vacuousness of the multitude is reminding me of my visit to a Jehovah's Witness compound in Colombia where the legions of the brain-washed wandered about in a similar stupefied reverie. Here it might be the effects of the holy herb, but nevertheless, it is affected and indulgent. I have stopped eating at the food circle, as my protest against the absurd ohm and hand-clapping ritual, and if another naked yuppie computer programmer from Munich calls me “brother” I will rudely lecture him on the evils of the back-to-nature tendency of the Hitler Youth in the 1930s.

... I wander over to a nearby Vision Council meeting where there is discussion of the location of the next World Gathering.

“Has anybody here been in Brazil?”, asks a dreadlocked man clutching a feather. They have decided to hold the next Gathering in Brazil, not because they have been invited by a group of Brazilian hosts, but because people want to go to Brazil. I've been to Brazil, to the Zapatista *Encuentro* hosted by the Workers' Party, but I feel uncomfortable saying this, as if it's way too political (Ryan 2006:96).

What is more, apoliticism is not merely *implicit* in the rationalities of the 'Rainbow children'. For many, it is a personal principle, worn on the sleeve. And although, as Storey (1998) points out, statements like “Politics is bullshit” can be very much political ones, depending on context – for instance, when they are aimed at the sham of parliamentary democracy, and when they are accompanied by action – they are all too often accompanied by an explicit aversion to collective action, or at least to any that is more 'political' than a drumming circle.

In comparison, instances where the problem is not so much apoliticism, but anti-intellectualism, are a little more difficult to spot; or at least, they are harder to spot as

counter cultural issues, primarily because they exist in arenas other than those more likely to be associated with counter culture.

## Structure and culture

But “culture” has many aspects; and counter culture means things other than “Alternative Lifestyles” with capital letters – that is, the iconic images of bohemian subcultures burned into the popular memory of what the late sixties were like. The counter cultural moment was distinguished by a breaking free from taken-for-granted social routines, and this was just as evident in changing ways of ‘doing’ politics as it was in the more spectacular and eye-catching developments in lifestyle. At their most mediocre, organisational models within the burnt-out old left of the 1960s had been fairly straightforward: on the more democratic end of the spectrum, ‘democratic centralism’ meant slate voting and following orders.<sup>14</sup> When elements of the New Left and the new social movements rejected the stagnancy and hierarchism of this model, this meant that new organisational frameworks had to be improvised, often from scratch and from the bottom up. Without central committees to make all the decisions anymore, more horizontal ways of doing things, and space for grassroots agency, were needed: spontaneously-constituted, DIY organisational *cultures* began to compete with old left command *structures* as the ‘hegemonic’ forms of post-“1968” social movements from below.<sup>15 16</sup>

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14 For a Situationist critique of the workings of the old Left sects – with their rigid division of labour between theory and practice, and their ‘gangs’ – see Raoul Vaneigem (1994).

15 This opposition I draw between ‘culture’ and ‘structure’ could be likened to the pull of countervailing forces within social groupings toward, on the one hand, more *Gemeinschaft*, and on the other hand, more *Gesellschaft*-type forms. (Drawing on Hetherington (1994), Halfacree (1999) explores this dynamic vis-a-vis social movements and ‘neo-tribal’ groupings.) This is a theme I will explore at a latter point in the thesis.

16 And this was indeed a competition: within the post-“1968” left, anti-authoritarian ways of doing things by no means became ‘hegemonic’. See Cox (2002) on the authoritarian developments coming out of the revolutionary moment of 1968 – symbolised for Cox by the moment of “1969”. Indeed, my above presentation of these developments comes to resemble something of a caricature in ways, when it is considered that many of the distinctively anti-hierarchical innovations associated with the new Left and new social movements (especially ones pioneered within feminist contexts) came out of reaction not just to the ways of the old Left, but to more hierarchical, authoritarian and “obnoxious” tendencies within the new Left (see Graeber 2004:86; Epstein 1991).

As Bookchin (1989) points out, there was much to be celebrated in these new organisational cultures, from an anarchist or libertarian point of view. Whatever the extent of conscious anarchist influence, in the shaping of the new cultures, deeply anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical values took root. On the other hand, such a rupture from established patterns of left activity could not take place without some damage being done, or without some proverbial babies being lost with the bathwater. As the new cultures developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in their looseness they sometimes worked up a deficit of coherence and cohesiveness, both organisationally and intellectually:

... the new social movements share a libertarian ambience and, for the most part, adhere to certain libertarian principles that render it impossible for institutionalized Marxist groups to speak to them. If anything, the anarchic dimension of the new social movements today risks the danger of being flawed by exaggeration. Exaggeration takes the form of a commitment to consensus, for example, that is so unswerving at times that a single individual can paralyse the activity of a group for hours and even demoralize it. Exaggeration in the form of a hypersensitivity to hierarchy can also result in a woeful lack of structure, indeed, a 'tyranny of structurelessness', in which a cohesive minority can control the activities of an unstructured majority which lacks clearly formulated means for making decisions (Bookchin 1989:270).

Elsewhere, drawing on his experience of the anti-nuclear movement in the United States in the 1970s, Bookchin considers the 'intellectual' as well as organisational repercussions of such practices:

Just at the moment when this quasi-anarchic antinuclear-power movement was at the peak of its struggle, with thousands of activists, it was destroyed through the manipulation of the consensus process by a minority... Nor, amidst the hue and cry for consensus, was it possible for *dissensus* to exist and creatively stimulate discussion, fostering a creative development of ideas that could yield new and ever-expanding perspectives. In any community, dissensus – and dissident individuals – prevent the community from stagnating (Bookchin 1995:18).

On top of all this, movement cultures lacking intellectual direction – the kind of thing Gramsci was so concerned about – can easily fall into 'subcultural' behaviour patterns, or what Halfacree (1999:217), discussing the work of Maffesoli (1996 etc.) and others, would call “tribal” behaviour. Of course, gangs of hippies and punks – the quintessential counter cultural 'SubCultures' with capital letters – are notoriously difficult to engage with as an outsider. But the subcultural problem is not limited to actors with things stuck in their faces. In his vision of a revolutionary culture, Gramsci in a sense emulated a principle that was at least expressed *in theory* by the hegemonic culture of the bourgeoisie – that is, its *absorbent* property; its openness to incorporate non-bourgeois elements into its ranks *ad infinitum* – alongside, of course, its proclivity to 'lead' other classes, culturally, morally, and intellectually. But a basic property of culture is its capacity to throw up fences around certain fields of human social activity, cementing their perimeters and generating special passwords and codes to facilitate access (what Halfacree (1999:217), in the context of 'neotribes', calls “closure”) – indeed, the very concept of culture is inseparable from those of distinction and 'otherness'. So if such openness is not expressed as a conscious principle in a given context, cultures, or more to the point, 'subcultures', can just as easily – perhaps, even, more easily – gravitate towards a certain insularity. Shades of this can also be seen in Bookchin's discussion of the conscious take-up of would-be anarchist organisational forms in new social movements culture, below; here, such forms represent very minimal structures in a context generally marked by structure's absence – where organisational gaps are instead filled in by recourse to repertoires of informal, taken-for-granted ways of doing things, for which the surrounding cultural envelope becomes the matrix.

Here, the seemingly 'anarchic' dimension of new social movements can become a caricature of anarchism, a body of ideas that never denied the need for clearly articulated grass-roots and confederal forms of organisation. Similarly, the Spanish anarchist 'affinity group' form of organisation which exists so widely in the United States tends to become ingrown groups of friends rather than action and educational groups that have a vigorous public life.

## **Counter culture, from NSMs to 'Activism'**

The co-ordinates of the social movement spaces found in the above examples – spaces that I consider to be counter cultural zones – lie at some distance from the terrains more typically associated with counter culture in the historical and popular memory, as do their problems. But the same problems still exist on the terrain of contemporary social movements, to large extents unchanged – yet their current co-ordinates are even further removed from that classical, popularly understood counter cultural pedigree; the culture of the new social movements at least unfolded in the slipstream of the archetypal counter cultural moment – happening to coincide with a “world historical movement” (Katsiaficas 1987) – but since then, yet again, the paradigm of social movement struggle has been re-defined, obscuring links to the past. The obvious place to look for this paradigm shift of sorts is the moment of the “movement of movements” of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the most likely contender for the title of most recent “world revolutionary moment”, even if the jury is still out on its 'world revolutionary' credentials.<sup>17</sup>

## **Days of action**

This is the moment of what might be called the 'days of action' running from the “anti-globalisation” summit protests of 1999 and 2000 through the mobilisations against the Iraq war and on to... well, more days of action. Of course, beneath the spectacular upsurges of these days of action has lain a broad and variegated expanse of movements and ideologies – a contested terrain populated by reformist NGOs, class struggle communists (anarchist and Marxist), primitivists, people who would seem more at home at a Rainbow Gathering, the ideology-less, crusty types and so on (this being to only speak of the movements of the global 'north' caught up in this moment; more on the 'south' in a moment, below); and there has been a corresponding expanse of issues:

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of this theme – albeit, 'in the heat of the moment' – see Cox (2002).

ecological, anti-corporate, anti-capitalist, anti-sweatshop, anti-neoliberal, anti-war, international solidarity, and so on.

### **The Zapatista narrative**

But, of course, to scratch the surface of this social movements present is to reveal its continuities with social movements past. It is common knowledge that much of the spirit of the movement of movements grew out of the Zapatista uprising and *Encuentros* of the 1990s. Movements and moments have to come from somewhere, and the Zapatista connection has allowed the movement of movements to be written as a story with somewhat pristine origins deep in the Lacandon jungle, Chiapas, Mexico; according to that story, this is what makes the movement of movements different, and novel: its earthy folk origins in the day-to-day struggles of an oppressed indigenous community in (what had been) an obscure periphery of the majority world.

But in so far as this 'Zapatista narrative' holds substance, it is important to stress Zapatismo's continuities with past movements, and moments. In reality Zapatismo emerged out of a synthesis of this indigenous world and outside currents; outside currents like Rafael Guillen, later Marcos, relocating to the jungle in the early 1980s, fresh from his solidarity work alongside social movement participants from across the world in Sandinista Nicaragua (Ryan 2006); outside currents like Guillen's Marxist *companeros* making the journey south from Mexico City to Chiapas. Were not these highly-educated outsiders alive to the legacies of 1968? In that year, Mexico was the epicentre of student struggle in Latin America; hundreds of thousands took to the streets again and again, and as many as 400 students were killed on one night alone: a clash between students and police that has gone down in history as a contender for the title of most bloody (Katsiaficas 1987:48). This is not to mention the traditions of radical left militancy within Chiapas itself (Mertes 2004).



If the origins of the movement of movements in Zapatismo are sometimes overstated, it is hard to begrudge this: not only are the Zapatistas in a very tangible way to thank for taking the initiative in galvanizing together the trajectories of social movements from across the world through the networking process embodied in the *Encuentros*, but their prestige is beyond question in that it takes libertarian, utopian and revolutionary politics to where it would like to be, but only so often is: the coalface of mass struggle between humanity and capital.

But in the interests of a serious and pointful analysis of the contemporary struggle against the world system, it is important to keep things in perspective, and not let the appeal of the Zapatista narrative cloud our ability to fully locate the movement of movements historically. Here in the North, there are indeed movement entities that trace their origins more or less directly to Zapatismo – highly significant and influential entities at that, in terms of the movement as a whole, such as the archipelago (one is tempted to say, 'tradition') perennially reinventing itself under such names as *Ya Basta!*, *Tute Bianchi* and *Disobedienti*. (This is not to mention the overarching significance of People's Global Action (PGA), providing an important networking framework for the movement, and directly traceable to the *Encuentros* process.) But even in these cases, the actors in question draw on more local – and deep – reservoirs of social movements experience and tradition – *Ya Basta!* and its offspring finding their formal crystallisation in the context of Zapatismo and the *encuentros*, for example, but finding their instant mobilising strength in their ability to draw on and even repackage the traditions and resources of autonomism and other left social movements, particularly in the Italian context. While *outside* these cases, the imagination of the movement is tugged at not only by the 'hegemony' of the Zapatista narrative: just as potent is the 'hegemony' of counter cultural traditions whose crystallisation is largely autonomous from Zapatismo, predating it (or at least its purchase in the North), and indeed looping directly back into counter cultural traditions continuous with the moment of 1968<sup>18</sup> – a connection that is seamless, even if what it connects to is perennially inchoate, uneven, and resistant to definition.

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18 I might point out that while "1968" was a thoroughly global phenomenon (Katsiaficas 1987), embracing both global North and global South, some of its legacies – such as counter cultural ones – were

To attempt to define this counter cultural 'hegemony' is not easy; to do so is to take on problems at the heart of this discussion – for example, the recuperability of apparently disparate movement currents under the unifying category of counter culture: the habitus of the vegan squat cafe and that of the Latin America solidarity activist day school. What might make clearer the affinity between these spaces is their orientation to telltale counter cultural themes. I would use the concept of 'activism' as a tool in identifying such a key, unifying theme.

### **The activist connection**

The words 'activism' and 'activist', of course, are fairly culturally and politically neutral in and of themselves. No doubt when Mussolini was ascending to power in the 1920s, the Italian Fascists could count on many ardent activists to win support for their programme, and to challenge political opponents. Catholic fundamentalism has had (and continues to have) its activists in Ireland, and when elements of the nineteenth-century British ruling classes sought to combat what they saw as immorality amongst the dangerous masses below them, these movements had their activists too. Ultimately, then, to generalise, we can probably not define 'activism' with any more precision than to say it is a field of human social activity geared towards furthering, in engaged, committed and 'hands-on' ways, a given social movement, from above or below; the practice of being 'active' on a particular issue.

But, of course, in more contextually-specific terms, 'activism' has acquired a rich tissue of other meanings. At this point it might be appropriate to note the curious philological phenomenon whereby social movement participants of outwardly disparate hues have come to identify with the terms "activism" and "activists" in recent years. People identify themselves as "activists", and speak of "the activist community". And various activities

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probably more regionally specific; in this case, being probably more Northern than Southern affairs.

are branded with the adjective: “activist research”; “activist media”; “activist street medic”; perhaps, “activist therapy”.

When people identify themselves or their activities in such terms, they are clearly not using “activism” in the general sense I attempted to define above; in other words, when people refer to “the activist community” – always a singular: there are no “activist communities” – they are imagining something that does embrace themselves and their colleagues, as well as other people connected to different groups, campaigns, issues and geographical locations, who they feel some affinity to even if they do not know them, but does not embrace people whose activism is aligned to, say, (speaking within an Irish context) the Irish forays of the British National Party, or, say, Islamist endeavours to introduce Sharia law and female genital mutilation into Irish Muslim communities.<sup>19</sup>

How do we explain all of this? The purchase of these concepts – of 'activism' and 'activists' – is hegemonic across a whole spectrum of social movement contexts in the countries of the North today, Ireland – the context with which I am most familiar, and towards which my analysis is necessarily biased – being no exception; that expanse of movements and sub-movements being (again in an Irish context) more or less analogous to the Irish wing of the “movement of movements”: from international solidarity to ecology, from anti-capitalist to anti-racist to “Counter Cultural” (with capital letters, as it were), and so on. I should point out that when I say that the purchase of these concepts is hegemonic, that is not to say that everyone in the social movement contexts in question subscribes to them; nor does it mean that within all of these contexts, subscription is dominant. In some contexts they are not – but even in those 'some', the concepts of 'activism' and 'activist' tend to at least be *at issue*. As I mentioned above, since the end of the 1990s, critical discourses – best defined by the “give up activism” thesis – have been raised around the “activism” concepts, and they have been influential,<sup>20</sup> leading to a

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19 One would hope; so long as there are no postmodernist moral and cultural relativists around, that is. Or, perhaps, opportunistic Trotskyist sects.

20 Above, I listed examples of instances where these topics were, more or less formally, pencilled in for discussion at movement get-togethers. But we can also see these themes trickling into movement discourses. For example, in a call-out for a day school on environmental and women's struggles held in Galway in 2005, the author contextualises the bid to relate “left libertarian politics” to such issues on

situation where, at the same time as the concepts are bandied around casually and relatively enthusiastically, they are also viewed problematically – this contradiction often emerging within the same circles.

It is the very fact of the concepts' widespread purchase – regardless of positive, negative or neutral accenting – that shows how deeply the issues *behind* the concepts run in these contexts. As for what these issues are, we must again attempt to locate contemporary anti-systemic social movements historically. To do so is to find that, from one extreme pole on this spectrum of movements to another – from dreadlocked permaculturists to class struggle anarchists and majority world solidarity types – there is a common line of continuity linking them with the moment of 1968 and the break with the old Left. While I have followed Cox (1999) in considering that, despite the tradition of arbitrarily distinguishing the 'political' from the '(counter) cultural' developments coming from this moment,<sup>21</sup> much of the 1968 legacy can in fact be usefully conceptualised under the heading of 'counter culture', the fact that there were more and less 'political' and 'cultural' tendencies in post-1968 counter culture is inescapable: those who sought to build alternative utopias in the here and now (or there and then), such as McKay's (1996) 1970s 'free staters', were not the same as the German Green Party. But their politico-cultural break came from the same place: a profound disenchantment with both the 'structures' and the routines not only of existence within capitalist hegemony, but also of the traditional, 'old' Left. For those on the more 'cultural' wing of this rupture, this impulse was expressed primarily through a revolt in lifestyle, while for the more 'political' actors in the 'new' Left and 'new' social movements, it was expressed primarily through re-inventing ways of 'doing' politics – for example, 'horizontally', and 'from the bottom up', entailing, as I have suggested above, a break from lifeless and rigid command

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the grounds that “These are, surely, in someways (*sic.*) an example of what the Bad Days Will End! talked about in their critique of the “Give Up Activism?” (*sic.*) document, which came out of the early days of the globalisation movement in England, when they wrote: “Perhaps, then, the first step towards a genuine anti-activism would be to turn towards these specific, everyday, ongoing struggles. How are the so-called 'ordinary' workers resisting capitalism at this time? What opportunities are already there in their ongoing struggles? What networks are already being built through their own efforts?” (Anonymous 2005.) (Here, the author refers to an article written in response to the original “Give Up Activism” text in the US publication *The Bad Days Will End!* (Kellstadt 2000)).

21 Albeit while routinely – and vaguely – acknowledging some kind of overlap between the two (Cox 1999).

*structures* to entirely new political *cultures*. And with these parallel departures from political and cultural orthodoxies came a parallel orientation to *action* – to setting about achieving change in practical, tangible ways, in the here and now; to insisting that the means justify the ends; to not waiting around – whether for the fulfillment of another stage in capitalist development to complete itself so proletarian revolution might be contemplated, or for the increasingly conservative foreign policy dictats of Moscow to change so that the local communist party might again become the vehicle for some vaguely radical activity.

This ethic of action and immediacy was expressed equally in the free music festivals of the US in the late sixties (Storey 1998) (and in the UK slightly later (McKay 1996)) – in an attempt to make manifest the principle that in the good society, pleasure would be a social institution, free and collective (Woodstock, as the slogan goes, being “a nation” (Clarke *et al* 1976));<sup>22</sup> through the *autoriduzione* (auto/self-reduction) of workload and of living and recreation expenses on Italy's shopfloor and on the stomping grounds of her “movement of '77” (Lumley); and in the attempted physical occupations of nuclear missile bases by the Greenham Common women and others. Indeed, the very preponderance of “(single) issues” around which movements organised in these years reflects the ethic of action and immediacy: issues of environmental desecration, militarism, women's rights and gay rights could no longer be set aside for the attention of an institutional Left waiting for narrowly and economically conceived versions of reform or revolution (or a new dictat from Moscow) – or rather, to paraphrase Holloway (2005) (in a slightly different context), it was time not for these issues to be brought out of waiting, but often simply out of *invisibility* and into existence.

The new ways of doing politics, then, were improvised, grassroots and ad hoc developments, responding to the sense that concrete things had to be done around certain issues, and that that had to happen *now*. This strategy brought successes of various kinds, from the changes in consciousness around issues of gender and sexuality, to the more

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<sup>22</sup> Albeit, by the time of Woodstock, the circuit of free, non-commercial US rock festivals was well along the road to utter co-optation (Storey 1998). The organisers may have let people in without tickets in the end, but Woodstock was *not* a nation.

tangible results of direct action against militarism and environmental abuses. In Ireland, mass direct action protest even brought down the state's nuclear programme (see Allen 2004, Allen and Jones 1990). But when, in the 1990s, the first winds of what would become movement-of-movements-type anti-capitalism made themselves felt, and “activist” discourses turned to the subject of “linking up” struggle, and taking on the common roots of what previously were seen in terms of “single issues” – such as capitalism itself – “activists” were to find out that the forms of protest they had developed (with some success) were not as unproblematically suited to fighting a social relation like capitalism, as, say, fighting a vivisection company. The author of “Give Up Activism” (Anonymous 2000) discusses this contradiction in relation to the “J18” protests in London in 1999:

The background of a lot of the people involved in June 18<sup>th</sup> is of being 'activists' who 'campaign' on an 'issue'. The political progress that has been made in the activist scene over the last few years has resulted in a situation where many people have moved beyond single issue campaigns against specific companies or developments to a rather ill-defined yet nonetheless promising anti-capitalist perspective. Yet although the content of the campaigning activity has altered, the form of activism has not. So instead of taking on Monsanto and going to their headquarters and occupying it, we have now seen beyond the single facet of capital represented by Monsanto and so develop a 'campaign' against capitalism. And where better to go and occupy than what is perceived as being the headquarters of capitalism – the City?

... We still think in terms of being 'activists' doing a 'campaign' on an 'issue', and because we are 'direct action' activists we will go and 'do an action' against our target... We're attempting to take on capitalism and conceptualising what we're doing in completely inappropriate terms, utilising a method of operating appropriate to liberal reformism.

Indeed, by this time – that is, the anti-capitalist moment directly preceding and coinciding with the emergence of the movement of movements in the North – the valorisation of action and immediacy, present since '1968', had become *accentuated* within counter culture. By the time consciousness of Zapatismo and the movement of movements was breaking in the countries of the North in the 1990s and early 2000s,

“activists” in the North were finding affinity around banners defined not by what they were for or against, but by what they did – or rather, how they did it; by form rather than content. “Activists” could now number themselves as part of the “direct action movement”, adherents to “DIY culture” (see McKay 1996,1998; Halfacree 1999) . A prime mover in the 1999 Seattle mobilisation was the Direct Action Network – with one of its participants, anarchist anthropologist David Graeber, paying dues to his “comrades” in the “direct action movement” (Graeber 2001:vii) in the acknowledgments of his 2001 book, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*, and stating that in many ways, “the activists are way ahead of us” (Graeber 2001:xii) – “us” being anthropologists or academics, presumably. Graeber was not the first intellectual to be attracted to the “direct action” and “DIY” movements, and not the first to be sanguine regarding their valorisation of action, seeing in it a positive move within anti-capitalism away from the irrelevant intellectualism perpetuated by ingrown castes of nominally Marxist or radical, but in reality liberal, academics, and towards a classically anarchic commitment to social change *in practice* rather than just in theory (see Graeber 2002, 2004).<sup>23</sup>

But beneath the valorisation of action, the strategic limitations of such an “activism”, as discussed above in “Give Up Activism”, lingered. Ultimately, that text amounted to a warning to “activists” of the dangers that lay ahead if they could not collectively work their way out of the activist 'box' that they had built for themselves. J18 was widely seen as a failure in that regard, and it was posited that anti-capitalists would have to get beyond the 'big days of action' model if they wanted to get anywhere. Indeed, the 'big days of action' were to taper off in the UK context within a year or two of J18 and “Give Up Activism” (Smith 2005). Much of the text's substance had been vindicated – but not in a good way. The 'big days of action' were abandoned, not because anti-capitalists had broken out of their “activist box” and found something better to do, but simply because it came to be widely felt that they were not working, and that it would be pointless to continue with them (Trocchi *et al* 2005:64). A paralysis of sorts set in. And when, in the

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23 Of course, at other times (e.g. 2004), Graeber makes a great contribution to sketching out how this field of praxis could be armoured with a new 'generation' of radical social theory (sketches which I will pay considerable attention to in the next chapter). And this is not to say that other “direct action” or “DIY” intellectuals have been indifferent to the question of tying theory into the practice: see e.g. Halfacree (1999) on the role of “third space” intellectuals.

UK, mobilisations of a 'big days of action' type were resurrected in 2005 around the G8 summit in Scotland, it was done in large part out of a sense that UK anti-capitalism was stagnating, and needed to be shaken up (Smith 2005:151) – so what better way to do it than a summit protest, the 'big day of action' *par excellence*!

To say that much of the “Give Up Activism” prophecy was proved correct is not to say that the UK wing of the “movement of movements” died a death in these years. Likewise, to say that the G8 mobilisation of 2005 was more about salvaging the movement than advancing it, is not to say that the mobilisation was not worthwhile. But the spectre of a movement so incapable of moving beyond its widely acknowledged problems – this, in the very years when the 'movement of movements' was supposed to be on a global upswing! – is a problem that demands attention. This is not just a UK issue: while the Irish anti-capitalist movement grew in these years (Cox 2006, 2007), in some respects a parallel stasis developed around the issue of 'big days of action' – best reflected in the souring interest in international summit-hopping (as discussed at the start of this chapter). And, as will be seen below, parallel problems can be seen in the USA; leading me to suggest that these issues – in one form or another – are universal across the “movement of movements” in the North.<sup>24</sup>

So why was the movement not able to “give up [its] activism”? To give up what the author of that document (drawing on the situationist Vaneigem) called its “fetishisation of action”? The answer, of course, would appear to lie in the nature of the addiction. From “Give Up Activism”:

Part of being revolutionary might be knowing when to stop and wait. It might be important to know how and when to strike for maximum effectiveness and also how

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24 This is not to ignore the fact that there are differences in composition across the various nodes of the movement *within* the North; as Cox (2007) points out, these movements in the English-speaking part of the North can at times be distinguished by their 'activist' character, whereas outside these regions the movement is often more broad-based, drawing on more 'traditional' social movements, such as sections of the labour movement (not that the labour movement is entirely absent from the Northern “movement of movements” – the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, involved in the PGA from its early days, being a notable case in point).



and when NOT to strike. Activists have this 'We must do something NOW!' attitude that seems fuelled by guilt. This is completely untactical.

... Vaneigem accuses “young leftist radicals” of “entering the service of a Cause – the 'best' of all Causes... They become militants, fetishising action because others are doing the thinking for them.”

... With direct action activists it's slightly different – action is fetishised, but more out of an aversion to any theory whatsoever.

In their look at activism within a US context, Featherstone *et al* expand on this theme. Paying homage to Adorno's critique of the “actionism” he perceived in the student and anti-war movements of the 1960s – a “collective compulsion for positivity that allows its immediate translation into practice” (quoted in Featherstone *et al* 2004) – Featherstone *et al* rebuke the idea that today's “activist left” are simply “an inchoate “post-ideological” mass”. For Featherstone *et al*, this mass is indeed deeply indentured to a totalising ideology of its own: that of “activism”, an overriding commitment to activism at all costs.

While elsewhere Graeber celebrates the shift in the centre of gravity of the Left from theory to practice in the context of the movement of movements, Featherstone *et al* effectively focus on the other side of this coin. Alongside positive developments such as the “impulse to resist hierarchy and mind-control” in “the new activism”, the authors identify an anti-intellectualism crippling the movement's ability to move forward from placard-waving and sloganeering. As the decline of Marxism has left an intellectual vacuum unfilled, “wooly ideas about a nicer capitalism” circulate freely on this horizon – with disastrous practical, as well as intellectual, effects:

If you lack any serious understanding of how capitalism works, then it's easy to delude yourself into thinking that moral appeals to the consciences of CEOs and finance ministers will have some effect. You might think that central banks' habit of provoking recessions when the unemployment rate gets too low is a policy based on a mere understanding. You might think that structural adjustment and imperial war are just bad lifestyle choices.

Even worse, amidst this activist culture, anti-intellectualism can often exist almost as an ethic. As Featherstone *et al* document, reflection on the way the world system works, and challenges to the more mindless and self-defeating applications of activism, are routinely shut down with calls that “We can't get bogged down in analysis,” and “That's all very interesting, but how can we organize around that? What would be the slogans?” Once again, form is allowed to dictate content.

As practice is dislocated from reflection, and tactics from strategy, this activism comes to resemble not a movement in the sense of something that goes forward towards a thought-out goal, but a culture cemented by certain values and rituals – activism as lifestyle choice. United not so much by a vision of socio-political change, as by certain moral impulses, the spectre of the “cadres who populate those endless meetings, who bang the drum, who lead the “trainings” and paint the puppets” (Featherstone *et al* 2004) begin to lend weight to Melucci's (1989) problematic concept of “nomads of the present”. Featherstone *et al* illustrate a shift towards activism for activism's sake with reference to the failed, costly and pointless protest against the National Association of Broadcasters in San Francisco:

During a postmortem discussion of the debacle one of the organizers reminded her audience that: “We had 3,000 people marching through [the shopping district] Union Square protesting the media. That's amazing. It had never happened before.” Never mind the utter non-impact of this aimless march. The point was clear: We marched for ourselves. We were our own targets. Activism made us good.

Featherstone *et al* point out that their analysis of “activism” is very much specific to the US context, relating it to the more general problem of the “stupidity that pervades American culture”, and opposing the US situation to the state of 'activism' elsewhere, and particularly Europe, where “activists' tiny apartments are stacked with the well-thumbed works of Bakunin, Marx and Fanon”. But as the parallels to the “Give Up Activism” texts show, the cult of action and of activism is as international as the movements and moments that spawned it; namely, I would argue, the movements bearing some continuity with the moment of “1968”, and with the counter culture which was their

matrix. It was here that the valorisation of action and immediacy incubated. Why these features, that had always existed in counter culture, blossomed as they did from a certain point in the 1990s onwards is a question beyond the scope of this thesis. But the continuity between the new social movements phenomena observed by Bookchin in the 1970s and 80s and the “activist” worlds of the US and UK in the 1990s and 2000s is clear.

Of course, neither Featherstone *et al* nor the author of “Give Up Activism” suggest that it would actually be possible, or desirable, to discard activism entirely – or at least not in the foreseeable future. Featherstone *et al* point out that their “gripe is historically specific. If everyone was busy with bullshit doctrinal debates we would prescribe a little anti-intellectualism. But that is not the case right now.” And while the role of the contemporary “activist” is not quite the same as that of the “leftist militant” of a bygone era discussed by Vaneigem (1994, cited in Anonymous 2000a), it is hard to imagine a social movement without the agency of more or less committed and experienced organisers, 'organic' intellectuals and what have you – whether these are called “activists”, or “militants”, or whatever else.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, personally speaking, it was the side to the critical discourses on activism that seemed to suggest that we *could* dispense with such roles that for a long time put me off the debate; how can you have a movement without activists? The answer, I think, is that you can't. But you can try and have a movement without “activism”.

Nevertheless, in some quarters, this is how the critique of “activism” has been interpreted; wrongly, I would say, but easy enough to do if you got very excited reading “Give Up Activism”, but never got around to reading the postscript – where the author acknowledges the serious practical problems of actually trying to do such a thing as take the title literally. Funnily enough, I associate this phenomenon with adherents to the most lifestyle sections of counter culture – the kind of people who would traditionally have been least useful in an “activist” sense (i.e. spadework: leafletting, making the

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25 Unless, that is, one equates revolutionary 'agency' only with pure 'spontaneity'; this conflict between notions of agency and of spontaneity will be considered later on.

phonecalls, sending the emails, going to the meetings, putting up the posters). Now, the nugget of knowledge that “activism” is a waste of time serves as a veneer of justification for such people to smugly slide even farther into their often rather incestuous and snobby cliques, where the worst aspects of counter culture and postmodern ideology intersect. They can then sneer at the people committed enough to actually be labelled “activists” for turning up at meetings and demonstrations, while they go off and develop their 'selves' together. Or do whatever it is that they do. This 'too-cool-for-school' attitude is another reason I would have for a long time been sceptical of the “activism” critique.

And in case it is not clear already, the ironic thing about all of this is that in their anti-activism, these lifestylists go farther probably than anyone else in valorising the more mindless expressions of the counter cultural orientation to action and immediacy: that it is the personal that is political (to the exclusion of everything else); that politics is a waste of time, and that revolution in “in the mind”, or in lifestyle. This parallels the counter cultural ethics that have been even more obviously co-opted, as manifested in practices of “ethical consumerism”, for example; revolution, in this case, being in the shopping trolley.

So, while it does not really seem conceivable to literally “give up” activism for the time being, the serious problems posed by “activism” ought to be appreciated. Indeed, I do not think that the above discussion of this problem goes anywhere near illustrating its most ghastly spin-offs: we might take, as but one example, the phenomenon of what might be called the “activist-super-heroes”, who abandon their jobs and other commitments to take on an *A-Team*-type lifestyle, roving from place to place seeking to solve problems; declaring that they are becoming “full-time activists” – often at the behest of no political-philosophical rationale other than the conviction that “the government aren't doing their job, so someone will have to”.<sup>26</sup> People like this are often great people, but collectively they form a sort of activist-*A-Team* subculture, that is

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26 This is to paraphrase a recently-turned “full-time activist” connected to Rosspoint Solidarity Camp – a protest camp attached to the County Mayo community struggle mentioned near the start of this chapter. For an account of the solidarity camp project – hinging on the attempts of “activists” to bridge the gaps between them and “community struggles”, see Dunne (2006).

difficult to reconcile with any concept of a coherent forward movement towards social change. Some have contempt for any notion of 'politics', refusing point blank to reflect on the links that join the dots of the objects of their choices in activism.<sup>27</sup> No time here for discussion of the systems of power, domination and oppression that might underlie the issues behind their forays in direct action protest camps in Ireland and Britain, their solidarity work in the West Bank, and their protests against deportations of asylum seekers in Dublin. Some activist worlds in the UK context – where the activist subculture is more developed than in Ireland – are particularly problematic spaces. As primitivism and kindred 'philosophies' have become more hegemonic, in some contexts more political consciousnesses have disintegrated, and tribalism has set in.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, I have attempted to show that everything on this landscape – that of the ethics of “activism”, of action and immediacy, of anti-intellectualism, and of 'culturalism' – is inseparable from the pedigree of counter culture. But when I try to do this, I consider that I am only articulating in a (somewhat!) systematic fashion something that is already implicitly and fragmentarily understood in the rationalities of many participants in 'movements from below' here in Ireland. Explicitly, this sentiment is expressed in loud denunciations of summit-hopping, “activism” and anything that seems counter cultural (in the everyday sense of the word). This sentiment tends to be found amongst actors affiliated to the consciously more left, more political, more class struggle and more communist sections of the movements, and tends to be accompanied by ambivalence towards projects deemed mere “activism” (in this sense, best defined as picking issues across which to campaign-surf: this week anti-racism, this week anti-war, this week ecological) and projects deemed counter cultural, in favour of “class struggle” – what 'Sacha' (2005) above called “solid class politics”.

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27 For example, this is the case with a prominent participant in the above-mentioned Rosport Solidarity Camp.

28 These phenomena ought to be particularly chilling for anarchists: the new apolitical politics is often located in spheres where, nominally, and in terms of form, the centre of gravity is anarchism. This is the interface between anarchism and the sort of woolly liberalism described by Featherstone *et al*, facilitated by an aversion to both theory and structure as described by Bookchin (1995) in his discussions on certain developments within NSMs and “lifestyle” anarchism.

In the rest of this thesis, I will be asking whether they are right or not. Are 'movements from below' too oriented towards counter culture (in its broad sense, including "activism"), and not enough towards "class struggle"?

## Chapter two: Relating to counter culture, locating counterpower

### Introduction

How can participants in oppositional social movements sensibly relate to their counter cultural heritage? Negatively? While Bookchin (1986:45-46 in Cox 1999:5) elsewhere points towards the progressive aspects of counter culture, as part of a broad libertarian drift within 1960s civil society that laid the “soil” for the growth of the new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, by the mid-nineties he was lamenting that a “widespread cultural decay has followed the degeneration of the 1960s New Left into postmodernism and of its counter culture into New Age spiritualism” (Bookchin 1995:55). In like fashion, we can make out in Bookchin's account the metamorphosis of what Stephens (1998) would have called “anti-disciplinary” revolt into narcissism and nihilism – the phenomenon of “hippie to yuppie”: “As one French “veteran” of May-June 1968 cynically put it: “We had our fun in '68, and now it's time to grow up” (Bookchin 1995:25). Commenting on a typical reference to Roman holidays and barbarians within the discourse of “lifestyle anarchism” (in Bookchin, a phrase that might best be understood as representing everything individualistic, irrationalistic and petit-bourgeois about the ostensibly anarchist wing of contemporary counter culture), he points out that:

Alas, the barbarians are already here – and the “Roman holiday” in today's American cities flourishes on crack, thuggery, insensitivity, stupidity, primitivism, anticivilizationalism, antirationalism, and a sizable dose of “anarchy” conceived as chaos. Lifestyle anarchism must be seen in the present social context not only of demoralized black ghettos and reactionary white suburbs but even of Indian reservations, those ostensible centers of “primality”, in which gangs of Indian youths now shoot at one another, drug dealing is rampant, and “gang graffiti greets visitors even at the sacred Window Rock monument,” as Seth Mydans reports in *The New York Times*...

Torn by the lures of “cultural terrorism” and Buddhist ashrams, lifestyle anarchists in fact find themselves in a crossfire between the barbarians at the top of society, in Wall Street and the City, and those at its bottom, in the dismal urban ghettos of Euro-America. Alas, the conflict in which they find themselves, for all their

celebrations of lumpen lifeways (to which corporate barbarians are no strangers these days) has less to do with the need to create a free society than with a brutal war over who is to share in the available spoils from the sale of drugs, human bodies, exorbitant loans – and let us not forget junk bonds and international currencies (Bookchin 1995:55-56).

Many years previously, before the hegemonic narcissism of the 1980s and 1990s had fully unveiled itself, the incorporability of counter culture to more individualistic and hedonistic times to come had been clear enough to certain Marxist commentators. Indeed, operating within a relatively orthodox Marxist theoretical framework, dismissal of counter culture comes easily: the rupture that spawns counter culture is significant in its own right – as an instance of social relations and superstructural forms going through the motions 'required' of them by the seismic rumblings emanating deep from within the forces of production. But once the tectonic plates of production have taken up their new positions, the cultural products thrown up by this process represent fairly irrelevant flotsam and jetsam – the loose, crusty sheards of lava rendered inconsequential in the sublime shadows cast by a changed economic landscape. Silber's (1970) analysis, of course, is in this vein.

At the same time, some retained a fairly orthodox<sup>29</sup> Marxist analysis of *how* the counter cultural moment came about – necessarily emphasising its incorporability to the needs of a changing mode of production – while refusing to rule out of consideration the potentially positive<sup>30</sup> developments arising out of counter culture (however 'accidental' they might be). Utilising Marcuse's (1964) notion of “repressive desublimation” to describe the transcendence of the values of the 'Protestant ethic' era of capitalist citizenship entailed in the counter cultural break, Clarke *et al* (1976:67) suggest that:

'Repressive desublimation' is a dangerous, two-sided phenomenon. When the codes of traditional culture are broken, and new social impulses are set free, they are

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29 Suffice to say, in this context, by “orthodox” I mean following more or less the kind of economic analysis outlined above.

30 Here, I use terms such as 'positive' in their everyday sense, as distinct from my discussion of 'positive' and 'negative' movement dynamics later in the chapter – a shift in meaning that hopefully will be clear enough.



impossible fully to contain. Open the door to 'permissiveness' and a more profound sexual liberation may follow. Raise the slogan of 'freedom', and some people will give it an unexpectedly revolutionary accent and content. Invest in the technical means for expanding consciousness, and consciousness may expand beyond predictable limits. Develop the means of communication, and people will gain access to print and audiences for which the web-offset litho press were never intended.

More broadly, Clarke *et al* frame these developments in terms of hegemonic crisis; though the counter cultural break is thoroughly bound up with the 'needs' of capital, and although it is an organically middle-class or petit-bourgeois phenomenon, *because* of its very social positioning – that is, within the 'dominant' culture – it is “strategically placed to generalise an internal contradiction for society as a whole” (Clarke *et al* 1976:69):

The counter-cultures... represented a rupture within the dominant culture which then became linked with the crisis of hegemony, of civil society and ultimately of the state itself. It is in *this* sense that middle-class counter-cultures, beginning from a point *within* the dominant class culture, have become an emergent ruptural force for the whole society. (*Ibid.* Original emphasis)

So, taking Clarke *et al*'s framing of the counter cultural break in terms of hegemonic crisis as meaningful, how can we better understand that moment's legacies? Writing in the mid-seventies, Clarke *et al* were cognisant of some of the directions in which counter culture was rapidly diffusing:

In the period between 1968 and 1972, many sectors of the counter-culture fell into 'alternative' paths and Utopian solutions. But others went forwards into a harder, sharper, more intense and prolonged politics of protest, activism, community action, libertarian struggle and, finally, the search for a kind of convergence with working-class politics (Clarke *et al* 1976:68).

Clarke *et al* also emphasise that many of the “larger meanings of the rise of the counter-cultures cannot be settled here – if only because, historically, their trajectory is unfinished” (Clarke *et al* 1976: 71). But their portrait of a counter cultural formation

fragmenting into more 'political' and more 'cultural' moments is not so far off interpretations of "1968" and its legacies developed in more recent years, and with much greater historical perspective – such as in Cox's (2002) model (as outlined in the previous chapter), where "1968" is used as a metaphor for what Cox (paraphrasing Katsiaficas (1987)) would call the 'world-revolutionary' dimension of these years, while "1967" represents the 'counter cultural' seedbed and "1969" the 'political' aftermath (the latter defined in no small part by the vying for the contested political spoils of still fresh hegemonic ruptures, played out between the various offspring of the "1968" moment in the new Left and new social movements: 'reformist', 'revolutionary', authoritarian, anti-authoritarian, etc.).

Earlier in this thesis, I have, of course, argued that much of what can be seen on the contemporary social movements landscape as bearing some kind of continuity with the new Left and new social movements formations coming out of "1968",<sup>31</sup> can in fact be usefully encompassed within a broad conceptualisation of counter culture. Here, I have followed Cox (1999) to some extent.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, I have suggested (as I have suggested elsewhere) that much of what more often falls within popular conceptions of 'counter culture' is in fact rather less 'counter' than the above; that all too often, when people say 'counter cultural', what they really mean is 'alternative' – and the two concepts are not necessarily the same.

It is now time to return to this subject; to move from appraising the more 'political' legacies of counter culture in relation to anti-systemic struggles, to relating the wider and more diffuse societal impact of counter culture to attempts to understand how society reproduces itself, and how that process is resisted and subverted.

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31 If, that is, such a continuity is observed at all: I have also noted how such continuities often get overlooked – social movement "activists" can have short memories.

32 This could also be seen as congruent with the emerging pattern identified by Clarke *et al* (1976), whereby counter cultural formations were seen to be diffusing widely in different directions, some more 'political' and some more 'cultural'.

First of all, I stand by what I said about 'counter' culture and 'alternative' culture. It seems to me fair to say that scenes such as those described by Ryan, above, at the 2001 Rainbow Gathering, are at least *not where it's at* when it comes to thinking about culture and opposition, and it might not be a great loss to leave such 'sites of resistance' to the much degenerated disciplinary niche of postmodernist 'cultural studies'. And it is fairly straightforward to conceptualise the degeneration of cultural forms that were once oppositional. Clarke *et al* (1976:66) point out that "Movements which seem 'oppositional' may be merely survivals, traces from the past". In somewhat more depth, Stuart Hall (one of the '*et al*' in Clarke *et al*) sketches a similar process, whereby forms on the 'field' of cultural contestation – a battleground for the formations of dominant and popular cultures – take on oppositional meaning, and subsequently lose it, as the ground beneath them shifts in line with the wider 'class struggle'.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in an era when economic growth has come to rely more and more upon ephemeral mass consumption (Clarke *et al* 1976; Harvey 1989) – particularly within 'youth markets' (albeit this does not have much directly to do with the Rainbow Gatherings, which distance themselves as far as they can from the market) – cultural forms that capture the imagination of 'youth' have developed a habit of becoming rapidly co-opted and commodified. The significance of this process – described, for example, by Storey (1998) with regard to the West Coast US rock 'counter culture' of the late 1960s – cannot be overstated; indeed, Storey might even have emphasised with more force that this West Coast 'scene' could be seen as having provided much of the template for commercial rock music over the next number of decades.

Could we conclude, then, that once a given 'hegemonic crisis' has passed, and the cultural forms it has given rise to have been co-opted – their origins in grassroots oppositional impulses notwithstanding – that the forces unleashed in the crisis have been pacified? Is that it, until the next 'hegemonic crisis' comes along? What happens to the oppositional

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33 Perhaps this is not altogether different from the principle expressed by William Morris (quoted in Bookchin 1991:viii) when he opined that "Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out to be not what they want, and other men have to fight for what they meant under a different name".

impulses underlying counter cultural forms 'between' hegemonic crises? Do they go into hibernation? Do they perish, and await resurrection?

Perhaps we need to re-examine the question – keeping an open mind about the meanings lying behind notions of hegemony and hegemonic crisis.

Or, to put it another way, it is time to turn from appraising the more 'political' spin-offs of counter culture in relation to anti-systemic struggle – what the previous chapter was mostly concerned with – to relating the wider societal legacies of counter culture to questions of social reproduction, and opposition to it.

## **Hegemony and hegemonic crisis**

In his critique of the tradition of 'scientific Marxism', Holloway (2005) attributes a functionalist bent to much Marxist theory of the twentieth century – when certain Marxists deviated from Marx's project of bringing to bear a purely *negative* analysis of the contradictions of capitalism (for reasons which we will consider below), turning instead to questions of how capital *reproduces* itself – a qualitative shift with not insignificant implications:

Functionalism, or the assumption that society should be understood in terms of its reproduction, inevitably imposes a closure upon thought. It imposes bounds upon the horizons within which society can be conceptualised. In Marxist functionalism, the possibility of a different type of society is not excluded, but it is relegated to a different sphere, to a future. Capitalism is a closed system *until* – until the great moment of revolutionary change comes. (Holloway 2005:137)

Gramsci, for his part, roundly condemned Marxist determinism, and even scientific ambitions within Marxism,<sup>34</sup> and his concerns with revolution were hardly 'relegated' to a

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<sup>34</sup> In these respects, the influence of the prominent anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel was probably a factor, as pointed out by Kolakowski (1978:222-223). For a more in-depth study of the curious

distant 'future sphere' – neither in theory nor in practice. But it is not difficult to see in his concept of hegemony a certain functionalist quality.<sup>35</sup> That is: there is hegemony; hegemony allows capital to reproduce itself; at some point (given the right doses of pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will, presumably) this may be dislodged by counter-hegemony.

Indeed, was Gramsci not in a sense leading the way in the shift of the Marxist centre of gravity towards analysis of capitalist reproduction? Holloway connects this broad shift to disciplinary pressures imposed on Marxist intellectuals as they sought to take Marx's theoretical *oeuvre* – much of it concerned with the contradictions of capitalist economics – and to develop it in the directions of social, political and cultural theory – as well, of course, as mainstream economic theory. Holloway sees such endeavours as highly problematic:

The understanding of Marxism in disciplinary terms, or as a theory of society, leads almost inevitably to the adoption of the questions posed by the mainstream disciplines or by other theories of society. The central question posed by mainstream social science is: how do we understand the functioning of society and the way in which social structures reproduce themselves? (Holloway 2005:135)

However, I cannot help but wonder about another possible reason why Marxist theory took the turn Holloway discusses. Holloway seems to suggest that Marxist theory took on concerns with social reproduction because:

⇒ Marxist intellectuals wanted to expand Marxist theory into other areas than those that Marx got around to theorising in his lifetime.

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relationship between Gramsci and his anarchist contemporaries (primarily locally, in Turin and Italy), see Levy (1999).

35 While not explicitly equating Gramsci's *oeuvre* with functionalism, Holloway (2005:135-136) points out that "Those authors who look to Gramsci to provide a way of moving away from the cruder orthodoxies of the Leninist tradition, have been particularly active in trying to develop Marxism as a theory of capitalist reproduction, with their emphasis on the category of 'hegemony' as an explanation of how capitalist order is maintained."

⇒ Marxist intellectuals evidently saw fit to carry out this project within the disciplinary parameters of the academy and of mainstream theories of society.

⇒ These disciplinary parameters, by their very nature, demanded that any Marxist theorising carried out under their 'roofs' adopted their overarching concerns: questions of social reproduction.

Alas, there was another compelling reason for Marxists to turn from conceptualising how capitalism was about to implode under the weight of its contradictions – as Marx had, in a sense, done – to conceptualising capitalism's knack for reproducing itself. As the “world historical movement” of 1917-1920 fizzled out, it became increasingly clear that the historical process Marx had been observing in the rise of classical nineteenth-century capitalism was *not*, in fact, the movement of an economic system towards its irresistible fate of rupture, but instead the evolution of a system towards greater than ever control over social life. Gramsci was better placed than Marx, historically, to conceptualise the attainment of this apogee of capitalist sovereignty – this 'hegemony'. It would certainly be stretching it to say that Marx lived in a *pre*-hegemonic era – (indeed, to speculate as to what point in time modern capitalist hegemony 'started' would surely be as involved a project as identifying the precise genesis of capitalism itself, and is very far beyond the scope of this paper) but its associations with functionalism notwithstanding, in Gramsci's work, the concept of hegemony is thoroughly bound up with concerns to explicate the historical evolution of capital's power structures. That is to say, hegemony is understood as a *historical* phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> As Marx wrote, this historical phenomenon had not yet fully unfolded. The taming and reining in along modern class lines of the often irascible and inchoate plebeian multitudes of the pre-industrial<sup>37</sup> era represented a fresh social

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36 A useful window onto Gramsci's thoroughly historical approach to the subject of hegemony is found in his preoccupation with the peculiarities of Italian history, or more precisely, the inability of Italian ruling groups to construct a unified nation state until much later than their counterparts in neighbouring territories. In the background to this problem is the inability of such groups to translate coercive rule into the kind of popular consent necessary for nations to be constructed – also the ingredients of hegemony. For a collection of Gramsci's frustratingly fragmentary observations on this subject, see the editors' long footnote on pp. 53-54 of the *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci 1971).

37 A few words of qualification here: by referring to the rebelliousness of the pre-industrial multitude, I do not mean to suggest that their rebelliousness can necessarily be explained simply by their pre-industrial nature. There is a perspective on questions such as this that is influenced by primitivist and anti-civilisation arguments, which *would* see humanity as having steadily become more 'tamed' with the

wound, and so Marx might be forgiven for misinterpreting its implications. This was not a luxury that Gramsci, in a Fascist prison after the defeats of 1920, could afford – hence the need to confront the reality of capitalist reproduction, and hence the needs for such concepts as hegemony.<sup>38</sup>

So, while Marx thought he was witnessing the process whereby an emergent, modern proletariat would shed the aimless, backward-looking or millenarian indiscipline of its social ancestors, and learn the discipline necessary to become the leading social group within society, what he actually was witnessing the evolution of a historically specific phenomenon: capitalist hegemony.

Where does this leave us? I have asked: how do we deal with the legacies, and the residues left behind in the wake of hegemonic crises – forms whose oppositional content may seem entirely depreciated? And I have suggested that, in order to make any headway on this subject, we may need to be critical about this question itself.

To start, I have followed Holloway in acknowledging the dangers of functionalism with which questions cast in terms of hegemony are invested. (Although I have challenged

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forward march of capitalism and of industry (for an example of this kind of discourse, see the long review of Linebaugh and Rediker (2000) in *Do or Die* 10 (Anonymous 2000c)). However, perhaps things were not so simple, or linear. Another approach to such questions would be to connect such rebelliousness not just to various multitudes' *pre-industrial* natures, but to their *transitional* natures – a possible factor of revolution considered by certain anarchist authors, e.g. Bookchin (1998) (with respect to the background of the Spanish Revolution), and Graeber (2002). To relate these perspectives to autonomist perspectives on “class recomposition” would be another possible avenue of study.

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Obviously this account of class composition in the transition to industrial capitalism conflicts somewhat with the project, spearheaded by EP Thompson (1963), of rewriting agency and autonomy into working class history, so a few words on this: Thompson's work no doubt represented an important corrective in this regard, but we ought to keep things in perspective. Beasley-Murray (n.d.) points out that the work of Thompson's proteges of sorts, Linebaugh and Rediker, represents a “veiled critique” of Thompson's failure to consider just how much the “making” of national working classes such as the English one was a defeat, as workers lost sight to a considerable extent of the solidarity that had once existed across national and ethnic lines. As Holloway (2005:167) points out in relation to a different tendency towards 'positivising' working class struggle: “In a world that dehumanises us, the only way in which we can exist as humans is negatively, by struggling against our dehumanisation. To understand the subject as positively autonomous (rather than as potentially autonomous) is rather like a prisoner in a cell imagining that she is already free: an attractive and stimulating idea, but a fiction, a fiction that easily leads on to other fictions, to the construction of a whole fictional world.”

Holloway's account of *how* this 'functionalism problem' came about – I will return to this theme below.) So with what theoretical tools can we proceed, without falling into the trap of functionalism?

If we were to follow Holloway here, functionalist Marxism's antithesis – autonomism – would not seem a much better candidate. To employ an autonomist perspective here might be to turn the question on its head – seeing in a given incarnation of capitalist 'hegemony' not the latest manifestation of capital's subordination of labour, but a moment ultimately shaped by the insurgent initiative of working class self-activity. Holloway rejects the autonomist inversion of the traditional Marxist understanding of class struggle: he applauds its astuteness in framing the working class as the “motor force” of capital, but sees in this an attribution to the class of a positive subjectivity – as an entity engaged in an essentially *external* struggle with an *external* enemy, capital – a fundamentally mistaken perspective, for Holloway.<sup>39</sup> He sees the truly radical (and only correct) logical conclusion of this line of thought in the observation that the working class indeed drives capital, but that this is through its positioning *within* capital, (re)producing capital through its labour. Thus, working class struggle is purely *negative*, revolting against the logic of the organism that imprisons it, and also relies on it for sustenance.

Looking at the state of play between capital and humanity today, it is difficult not to see that Holloway has a point. If the working class really is in the driving seat of the social totality, then it has some serious questions to answer. At the heart of the autonomist tradition's origins, Holloway identifies a tendency to generalise from the experiences of social struggles inside and outside the factory in late 1960s and 1970s Italy, when indeed large swathes of the working class showed the initiative to wage a most offensive and far-reaching struggle against capitalist sovereignty. But for Holloway, such generalisation is inherently ill-conceived, precisely *on account of* the moment in question's exceptionality.

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39 Holloway (2005:166) does point out that both the positive and negative interpretations of working class struggle/ subjectivity are present in the autonomist tradition – it is just that the positive one predominates.



But there is something wrong with Holloway's logic: if the trouble with functionalism is that "It imposes bounds upon the horizons within which society can be conceptualised", then is Holloway not falling into this trap? Holloway condemns the autonomists for using the Italian struggles as a foundation for their theoretical project, because those struggles go against the patterns he sees as defining the relation between working class and capital. The problem here is that such a dismissal is only tenable within the framework of a static and ahistorical view of society<sup>40</sup> – in this case, society conceived in terms of the hegemonic arrangements of advanced capitalism.

Within such a static view of hegemonic capitalism, then, the autonomists' preoccupation with the peculiarities of the Italian struggles makes little sense; if anything, those struggles, with their positive and offensive ambience, warrant research as an aberration, a 'deviancy', from the negative, internal relation of working class to capital seen by Holloway as typical of the era. But Holloway might do well to take some of his own advice on the dangers of functionalism, and remember that such hegemonic arrangements represent a historical phenomenon; and he might do well to bear in mind the historical scope of much autonomist theory – autonomists having proved their non-functionalist credentials (whether they have ever made such a policy explicit or not) by refusing to accept the temporal 'horizons' of hegemonic advanced capitalism as frame for their analysis. Within such a frame, theorizing around the Italian struggles would represent an unwarranted generalisation; when such a frame is transcended, however, attention to such struggles represents the first building block in a network of bridges across time and space reaching out to other examples of 'working class' autonomy and agency; all in all, a reminder not to take for granted how the hegemonic arrangements of our period are patterned.

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points out (in a well-justified dig at sociologists, Marxist, Functionalist (with a capital 'f') and otherwise), "If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences".

And as Thompson (1963:11)

It might, then, be appropriate at this point to see where those bridges take us, and what those vantage points reveal about questions of 'internality' and 'externality', as well as 'negativity' and 'positivity'. I will take the question of 'externality' and 'internality' first.

## Inside and outside the whale

Holloway rejects the autonomist notion of an 'external' relation between working class and capital, where the history of capital is seen as “a history of *reaction* to working-class struggle, in much the same manner as one might see, say, the movements of a defending army at war to be a function of the movements of the attacking army, or, possibly, the development of the police to be a function of the activities of criminals”(Holloway 2005:165). For Holloway, capital is less an external parasite feeding off its host, the working class, as the working class moves forwards, and more the whale inside which Jonah – the working class – has become trapped. But while it would be lunacy to idealise a 'golden age' of working class autonomy before its 'fall' into modern capitalist hegemony, neither should we assume that humanity was always inside the whale; and history can show that past struggles between 'multitude' and capital<sup>41</sup> have sometimes been more 'Moby Dick' than 'Jonah and the whale'.<sup>42</sup>

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41 Here, I favour terms such as 'humanity' and 'multitude' over 'working class' (although I do not treat the former as being completely interchangeable – see below). It is impossible for me to escape using the term 'working class', especially when referring to the work of other authors; however, when I can, I place it in a quarantine of sorts. Later in this thesis, I will elaborate a little on my own thoughts on this subject, but suffice to say for the moment that I think Hardt and Negri do a reasonable job of summing up the problematical nature of the term 'working class' in the opening pages of *Multitude* (see Hardt and Negri 2004:xiv-xv). And a few words on the nuances of my use of 'multitude' versus 'humanity' here: firstly, as will be made slightly clearer later in this chapter, I follow the attempts of such anarchist thinkers as Kropotkin and Bookchin to breathe life into the concept of 'humanity' and even human nature (not to mention the efforts of the Zapatistas, who frame the global project with which they identify themselves as being “for humanity and against neoliberalism” (see Marcos 2003)); and secondly, I wish to recognise that it is unsatisfactory to speak of 'class struggle' (to leave aside the problematics of this term for now) within capitalism as simply a struggle between one section of 'humanity' and another – for I do not think that it is entirely *people* who are in control of capitalism: following Dauvé's (1997) and Graeber's (2004) perspectives on the nature of capitalism, I think it reasonable to suggest that 'capitalists' too are imprisoned to some degree within the totalising logic of capital. But that is not to say that these elements should be let off the hook: part of the mass of humanity trapped within capitalism the capitalists may be, but part of the multitude – a formation whose contours can only really be defined in relation to its periodic struggles with capital – they are not; and so I think it appropriate to speak of the plight of 'humanity' *within* capital, and the struggle of the 'multitude'

Autonomists, and writers associated with the tradition, have drawn widely on historical investigations to sketch out the potentiality for working class autonomy and agency. Against this backdrop, Holloway's metaphors of attacking and defending armies and police forces begin to seem less far removed from the historical realities of the struggle between multitude and capital. In their endeavour to excavate the "hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic" of the eighteenth century, Linebaugh and Rediker's (1996, 2000) analysis hovers around the theme of the "many-headed hydra" – the recurring metaphor used by the agents of capital to describe the ubiquitous and ferocious resistance of the multitudes they attempted to exploit. On this historical landscape, the relation between capital and humanity was not just external – it was war. Slaves were hunted like animals and crammed into death-ships across the Atlantic; sailors were brutally press-ganged into the bonded labour of naval servitude; slaves, sailors, soldiers and journeymen of all skin colours (sometimes autonomously, sometimes in unison) launched vengeful insurrections against their enemies, "white people";<sup>43</sup> and sailors, once again of all ethnic backgrounds, defected from merchant and naval service, and from wage labour (or slavery), to live off the spoils of piracy, emerging from their often startlingly libertarian "pirate utopias" (Wilson 1996) outside the bounds of Atlantic civilisation to prey on the forces of commerce to which they were formerly indentured, and to occasionally launch brutal offensives against regional centres of power when scores needed to be settled – or whatever.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, this was the era of the plebeian insurrection of the Parisian *sans-culottes*, of the London poor who liberated the jails in 1780 (see Linebaugh 1991; Linebaugh and Rediker 1996), and of the Whiteboys in the Irish countryside;<sup>45</sup> an era

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*against* it. Moreover, without rushing to accept all of Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2004) 'Imperial' autonomist analysis in all its aspects, I know of no better term than 'multitude' with which to point towards the vastness and disparateness of the mass of humanity outside the interest-zones of the capitalists and power elites.

42 For a reflection on the strange correspondences linking Orwell's and Thompson's 'whale narratives', and Linebaugh and Rediker's work, see historian Robert Gregg's (2004) review of *The Many-Headed Hydra* (a piece which I read *after* I wrote this section, I might add! (The review, not the book, that is.)

43 Linebaugh and Rediker (1996) explain that once upon a time, this term seems to have had more to do with ideas about class than about race.

44 Regarding the libertarian nature of much of the pirate 'civilisation', see for example Linebaugh and Rediker (2000:163); Wilson (1996); Rediker (1987). A comprehensive review of much of the pirate literature, from an activist perspective, can be found in *Do or Die* 8 (Anonymous 1999).

45 Linebaugh and Rediker (1996) look at Irish Whiteboyism from an angle rarely considered: as a seedbed

when the prospect of insurrection was evidently never far beneath the surface of popular discontent, and when such insurrectionary impulses came relatively naturally.

There is good reason here to see evidence of an external relation between 'working class' and capital, as well as the autonomy of the 'working class' from capital. As often as not, antagonism between the two entities in this period seems to have been expressed in terms of outright social war – an open battle between oppressed and oppressors. Indeed, even though Linebaugh and Rediker (1996) distinguish between such transgressiveness and the more well known “licensed outrages” of the “eighteenth-century plebeian “mob””,<sup>46</sup> we can also see in the latter elements of autonomy. After all, food riots and the like crucially revolved around popular belief in a “moral economy” – a belief system autonomous from and at odds with the free market logic of the developing capitalist elites. No ethical hegemony of capital here, then: food riots – involving the appropriation of foodstuffs through collective action, at prices deemed reasonable by the collective – were at least as 'autonomous' as the *auto-riduzione* of foodstuffs and cinema tickets practiced by the Movement of '77 and its cohorts (see Lumley 1990).

But even if some of the “mob” activities of the period could still be considered to fall within the bounds of 'protest', the insurrections of the period can not. Those who revolted in New York in 1741, in Boston in 1747, and in Barbados in 1816 (see Linebaugh and Rediker 1996), were not concerned with negotiating a better deal within a social totality whose parameters they essentially accepted – to all appearances, they were concerned, however desperately, with blasting holes in that system, to create breathing space in which to live as human beings, and no doubt they would have destroyed the whole rotten edifice if they had had half the chance. Conversely, the praxis of desertion and evasion, whether of escaped slaves to 'Maroon' communities on the fringes of New World colonial

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for insurrection across the lands where the Irish diaspora spread.

<sup>46</sup> In so doing, equating such “outrages” with the liberal reform movement in a way that I do not think is entirely credible; I think that the origins of food riots etc. were wider and deeper than this. For instance, recent research has shown that food riots were very much a phenomenon in such contexts as 18<sup>th</sup> century Galway, where (admittedly sparse) evidence would seem to locate them nearer to the underground world of Whiteboyism than to any reach of English reformism. See Cunningham (2004).

society (see Linebaugh and Rediker 1996), or of sailors to the pirate ships and 'pirate utopias', in a sense resembles anything that could even be called 'protest' even less.

It cannot be clear at this point how much we can generalise on the subjects of 'externality' and autonomy on the basis of such evidence. The period in question is a particularly tumultuous and transitional one, with social, economic and cultural forms in flux. Indeed, the spectre of dissent in these years is in ways a bewildering kaleidoscope, as it becomes difficult to work out which instances had their roots in early modern traditions of peasant *jacqueries*, which ones in eighteenth-century conceptions of 'moral economy', and which ones 'in the future', as it were – their composition prefiguring the emerging class formations of the industrial era (see Linebaugh and Rediker 1996). But to assume for a moment that we *can* generalise on the subjects of 'externality' and autonomy to some degree, this would still leave the question of 'positivity' versus 'negativity' unresolved, for it is hardly the same thing.

### **Negativity and positivity**

An obvious meaning of Holloway's emphasis on the negative (as opposed to positive, naturally) nature of antagonism to capital, has to do with its allegedly reactive quality: capital sets the scene, and working class elements may react. Alas, the eighteenth-century insurrectionaries of Linebaugh and Rediker hardly buck this trend. For them, capital may still have seemed an external force which could be combatted with brute force – they had not accepted or internalised its logic – but there was no doubt that their resistance was essentially defensive in character: defensive against enslavement, against impressment, against enclosure, expropriation and free market extortion – all offensive “social movements from above”<sup>47</sup> – as the forces of capital moved the goalposts against customary rights and entitlements, and became more acutely oppressive. Not too much

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<sup>47</sup> This is to dip into Cox and Nilsen's (2005; 2006) exploration of class struggle – or what is typically referred to as class struggle – in terms of the interplay between “social movements from above” and “social movements from below”. However, I defer any attempt to relate Cox and Nilsen's analysis in any systematic way to the question of 'who-reacts-to-who' being addressed here.

here, then, it might be said, to topple Holloway's critique of the autonomist view of the working class as a positive force, determining the course of capitalist development. But it might be worth thinking a bit more about the basis of Holloway's conceptions of positive and negative struggle.

I have already discussed, briefly, Holloway's case for understanding opposition to capital in negative terms – arguments that make sense, I have suggested, in the context of advanced hegemonic capitalism. But Holloway does not qualify his analysis as being applicable specifically to the 'here and now' of capitalism, and so we are left to assume that Holloway sees the movement of capital as always positive, and opposition to it as always negative. This would, of course, be perfectly in keeping with the traditional Marxist view of history and of capitalist development. Here, the formations of capital and class emerge in a distant past as necessary evils in the context of natural scarcity; to cope with adverse natural conditions, so the story goes, humanity is forced to create division of labour, as well as social hierarchy and authority, so that society can materially develop in some kind of coherent and efficient manner.<sup>48</sup> Particular patterns of social relations and superstructural forms emerge appropriate to a given configuration of the forces of production, and when development, or the need for development, comes about within those forces of production, social relations and superstructural forms adjust accordingly, even prefiguratively (often a turbulent process).<sup>49</sup> All the while, capital's trajectory is a positive, unstoppable one – until, of course, the forces of production reach such a point of

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48 For a critical discussion of the centrality of the concept of natural scarcity in Marx's writings – for example, (with Engels) in *The German Ideology* (1964) – see Bookchin (1991:65).

49 Probably the classic statement giving the general outline of this approach comes in Marx's (1970:181-2) preface to "A contribution to *The Critique of Political Economy*", quoted in Carter (1989):

"At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."

Carter also gives a sense of some of the more notable attempts to defend the theory within "contemporary analytical philosophy".

development that the social relations and superstructural forms of class society no longer serve a purpose (or 'function', perhaps), and may be abolished – cue more turbulence.<sup>50</sup>

Now, the first thing to be said is that surely anything would seem 'negative' compared to this! You can't get much more 'positive' than the task of dragging humanity out of the doldrums of scarcity and primality and onwards to the point of material development at which communism becomes viable – a 'positive' trajectory guaranteed by the laws of history. But this model of history has been a poisoned chalice for Marxists. In ways, it has been a smugly guarded holy grail, a source of prestige for intellectual Marxists, and the tool that allowed Marxist historians in particular to hold so much sway within their 'profession' for much of the twentieth century – the model proving useful indeed in appearing to explicate certain historical developments.<sup>51</sup> But politically, and from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, the cement that this model of history once provided for radical thought has significantly decayed. As Holloway (2005) points out in his chapter on “The tradition of scientific socialism”, the fit between a theory so open to being framed in terms of historical laws and unstoppable processes in the economic infrastructure of society on the one hand, and revolutionary praxis on the other, is an obvious issue. This has ripped Marxists of different instincts apart, with those content to wait for historical processes to fulfill themselves autonomously from the activity of revolutionaries at one extreme, and Marxists insisting on the need for immediate revolutionary intervention (of various kinds) at another.<sup>52</sup> Underlying this has been

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This may sound like a caricature of sorts. But I think its basic outlines are faithful enough to both traditional Marxist thought, and to Marx's thought. And if this schema seems incongruous in relation to where much contemporary Marxism is 'at', I would ask: has such contemporary Marxism explicitly ditched such a conception of history? If so, what has been put in its place? Has such a conception of history simply been put to one side quietly, or has it joined the ranks of those Marxian concepts such as value and dialectics which some 'Marxists' feel free to discard, while continuing to call themselves Marxists?

51 Probably the best known example is that of the French Revolution, where “the Marxist interpretation” – or rather, the approach to the revolution pioneered by a certain lineage of French Stalinist historians, such as Lefebvre and Soboul (there were other 'Marxist interpretations' that did not fit into this framework) – essentially became the conventional interpretation; although over some decades its 'hegemony', as it were, has become increasingly eroded. For an introduction to some of the debates involved, see Blanning (1998).

52 Or rather, at 'others': this statement could apply to rather different kinds of Marxists, such as Leninists on the one hand, happy to approach revolution as a technical matter of seizing power to be taken care of by whatever means necessary – in practice by extremely vanguardist means – and on the other hand, the likes of Luxemburg, concerned with much more 'bottom-up' approaches to the question of revolutionary

intellectual disarray, not just between individuals, but *within* individuals. Even Marxists such as Pannekoek and Luxemburg, that is those most insistent on the need for an emphasis on mass, grassroots-oriented revolutionary action – the 'carpe diem' school – have declared their allegiance – 'in theory', as it were – to “the theory”, or in other words to the idea of Marxism as 'scientific socialism' (Holloway 2005:124). This contradiction, this confusion, has never been resolved within Marxism.

I am not sure if autonomist theory fares much better on this front. If the working class determines capitalist development, does that mean that it *created* capital as well, as some kind of Frankenstein's monster? How did this relationship 'start' in the first place?

Autonomists may have been astute to throw light on Marx's neglected analysis of the labour process in Volume I of *Capital*, where he points out how technical innovation in the factory is determined to a great extent by the challenge of the “refractory hand of labour” (Marx 1965:403, quoted in Holloway 2005:161) – a key theoretical reference point in the origins of autonomism. But if this yields an insight into how capital's *course of development* is shaped – i.e. by the activity of the working class – then in broader theoretical terms, how do we reconcile this observation with Marx and Engels' account of capital's *genesis*? Or rather, the genesis of the social forms that would evolve into those of capital, such as social stratification and division of labour – developments Marx and Engels took as progressive, given that they afforded certain strata within society the freedom from “wants” essential if they were to set about the specialized activities necessary for social development to have a chance; for only enough surpluses, we are told, existed to free up the energies of a very limited social stratum, and if this privilege, and this stratification, were not a reality, then “*want* is made general, and with want the struggle for necessities and all the old shit would necessarily be reproduced” (Marx and Engels 1964:46, quoted and re-translated in Bookchin 1991:65). In other words, humanity would be going nowhere.

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intervention. Meanwhile a major axiom of Gramsci's theory was concerned with getting away from Marxist predilections toward faith in 'iron laws of history', stressing instead the centrality of human agency in shaping history.



What are the implications, then, of a 'working-class-struggle-as-positive' approach for our conceptions of historical development? For our present purposes, these questions are important, because they have a bearing on how we can interpret such episodes of 'hegemonic crisis' as the 1968 outbreak and its legacies, and, crucially, the nature of the oppositional impulses they manifest.

With all of this in mind, the appeal of the autonomist 'inversion' is obvious. But, as Holloway argues, this appeal may be compromised by the reality of opposition to capital as a negative endeavour. However, let us think for a moment – firstly – about *why* the autonomist position holds such appeal. Is it not because it dramatically dumps a whole cache of baggage with which any endeavour within a Marxist tradition would normally be encumbered? A move inscribed in what would come to be known as autonomism at least since Tronti's pioneering 1964 contribution to 'workerist' thought, his essay 'Lenin in England':

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class (Tronti 1979:1, quoted in Holloway 2005:160).

And let us think for a moment, secondly, about why this change of tack is so mistaken, according to Holloway. Essentially he rejects it on the basis that Marxism, properly understood, is crucially a *negative* project, reflecting a *negative* reality of working class struggle, with which the autonomist emphasis on working class struggle as positive cannot be reconciled. And whatever we think of the negative or positive credentials of working class struggle, we must admit, I think, that Holloway has a point. I have sought to contextualise Holloway's emphasis on the negative character of Marxism by rooting it in pillars of Marxian theory such as Marx's theory of history. If we accept the negative character of this Marxist theoretical bedrock, then I think we must accept that any 'Marxist' formations training their theoretical guns on the basis of an inversion of Marxian class struggle perspectives are operating on decidedly shaky theoretical ground.

Effectively, then, despite appearances, and despite even Holloway's ambiguity towards the Marxist label, in a funny way what he is doing is stomping on an excursus from Marxian negativity with the disciplinarian boot of Marxist orthodoxy, and bringing it back into safer Marxist moorings. And within a Marxist theoretical framework, the autonomists may well be culpable for such treatment. But what if we did not accept those Marxist theoretical moorings? What if we recognised the predicament of these (personified and disembodied!) autonomist insights as being at odds with those moorings – that they are correct even, and the moorings flawed – and we helped them to transcend them? As *Marxist* perspectives, they are contradictory; but if we jettison some more Marxist baggage, and armour them with tools drawn from outside the Marxist tradition, they may begin to make more sense.

### **Jettisoning baggage**

What baggage will we jettison in the process? And, to dip into the language of David Graeber (2004), what walls will we blow up in reaching out for new insights?

To start off, I think it is worth pointing out that while Marxism has often excelled at critically analysing the workings of capitalism, its cousin anarchism has sometimes done better at exploring *alternatives* to capitalism and to domination – through attention to the kernels, shadows and residues of alternatives perceptible in the 'real world', and across time and space, as well as through more utopian pursuits. To use a somewhat uncomfortable academic analogy, while Marxism has tended to adapt itself most readily to disciplines such as economics, sociology, philosophy and history (whether to 'negative' expressions of these disciplines in the spirit of Marx, or what Holloway would consider more functionalist ones – and all of them oriented very much to the study of 'western' society), anarchism, while always marginal to the mainstream thoroughfares of academies and intelligentsias,<sup>53</sup> has tended more towards strange affinities and correspondences with anthropology. Not surprising, of course, given anarchists' many

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53 For a brief examination of why this has been the case, see Graeber (2004).

and varied preoccupations with such questions as how society might function without the state, what a world without hierarchy might look like, how leaderless groups can work effectively, how a moneyless economy (Maussian and Polanyian critiques of the very concept of economy aside – see Graeber (2001)) might function, and so forth. For the scope of such questions extends beyond the kinds of answers study of western society alone could ever readily provide, and the scope of anthropology has always been unique in its concern with *all* of humanity – as opposed to other disciplines who throughout their history have shamelessly and consistently given precedence to the experiences of western 'civilisation', with all of the ignominious consequences, such as, in our own age, the intellectual myopia surrounding the supposed uniqueness of western 'modernity' and 'postmodernity'.<sup>54 55</sup>

But what does this have to do with autonomism, and autonomism's need (as I have perceived it!) to jettison items of Marxist theoretical baggage? As autonomists put working class struggle 'first', to paraphrase Tronti, they hew closely to theoretical areas close to the heart of anarchism – or, to be more precise, of that current within anarchism where strange correspondences with anthropology, and with 'real-life' alternatives and resistance to alienation and domination, have ebbed and flowed. Amongst well-known autonomists, Cleaver (e.g. 1993) has been the one astute enough to pay homage to

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54 Of course, some of these kinds of questions overlap with Marxist concerns; but they have tended to be accented rather differently, not least on account of anarchists' and Marxists' often differing perspectives on the subjects of utopianism and prefigurative politics. The origins of Marxist antipathy to utopianism are rather understandable in their historical context, that is the creepily "paranoid, totalitarian" (Graeber (2001) on positivism) utopianism of nineteenth-century authoritarian socialists (see Draper 1966). Ultimately, this attitude would turn into a widespread refusal within Marxism to attempt to prefigure in any detail what a post-capitalist society might look like, ostensibly because that task would have to be up to people caught up in the revolution themselves. It is, of course, easy to imagine how such an attitude would become ossified in the context of 'Marxist functionalism'. Of course, anti-utopianism was certainly not without its anarchist adherents, notably Kropotkin. Key to Kropotkin's theory, of course, was the thesis that the post-capitalist future could be seen *emerging* in the present – and that it was the task of anarchist revolutionaries to promote this process and eliminate obstacles to it (see Cleaver 1993) – rather, presumably, than to second guess it.

55 For a discussion of the different kinds of questions anarchists and Marxists have tended to ask, see Graeber (2004). Also see Graeber (2004) on the relationship between anarchism and anthropology. Indeed, to this account of Graeber's, we might add more correspondences, for instance the heavily anthropological accent of much of Kropotkin's and Bookchin's most important work, as well as the work of anarchist anthropologist Harold Barclay. (Of course, the fact that individual omissions such as Barclay seem so significant in Graeber's account is testament to the utter marginality of self-confessed anarchists within academia generally!) Also see Graeber (2004) on the ethnocentrism, racism, and colonialism underlying many academic disciplines.

Kropotkin, easily the most enduring theorist of the 'classical' anarchism era,<sup>56</sup> for his concern with exploring the spontaneous drives towards mutual aid and towards the evolution of progressive and egalitarian ways of organising life ubiquitous across humanity (as well as among animals, according to Kropotkin). Seeing on this vista a scientific principle of evolution,<sup>57</sup> for Kropotkin, this pattern represents nothing other than the process through which the future can be seen unfolding itself within the present; for revolutionary anarchists, the task being to promote this process, and to confront obstacles and impediments lying in its path. Cleaver sees Kropotkin's rigorous investigation of such phenomena as paralleling, and complementary to, autonomist concerns with “self-valorisation” – the means by which working class people, in their everyday activities, seek to optimise their non-alienated experience of life – or in other words, seek to reclaim and develop their humanity, in doing so struggling against the constraints imposed upon them by capital.

In itself, this does not help resolve the contradictions of the autonomist position; but the thread of Kropotkin's analysis has not been lost within anarchist thought. In working out where this thread comes out most usefully in more recent anarchist theoretical formulations, we can behold a number of options. We can lead into these by taking a look at the work of Murray Bookchin.

## **Bookchin**

In his endeavours to synthesize social and ecological perspectives, in his emphasis on immanent drives towards “freedom” and “consciousness” – as well as “mutualism” – in the evolution of nature (both human and non-human), and in his dialogues with developments in the “natural sciences”, Bookchin is probably the twentieth-century anarchist to have most convincingly carried on the mantle of Kropotkin – a debt he

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56 A status pointed out by Bowen and Purkis (2004).

57 Kropotkin's reputation was as much as an internationally-esteemed scientist, and geographer, as an anarchist. See historian Paul Avrich's introduction (1972) to *Mutual Aid* for an overview of Kropotkin's scientific career.

would very much acknowledge (see Bookchin 1991:xxviii). But whereas Kropotkin (like Bakunin and Proudhon) seems to have, oddly enough, echoed Marx's identification of the progressive role of the state in history – as a 'necessary evil' of sorts (Bookchin 1991) – Bookchin, in his 'magnum opus' *The Ecology of Freedom* (1991), turns this standpoint on its head, locating it, along with much of the rest of what made up Marx's theory of history, in the assumptions of Victorian common wisdom positing humanity as being locked in an eternal struggle with nature. Bookchin targets the notion of natural scarcity upon which the architecture of Marx's theory of history rests. For Bookchin, the notion of a 'stingy' nature is utterly inadequate to explain the emergence of social stratification; this understanding of nature is erroneous in that it distorts the reality of an extraordinarily “fecund” planetary eco-system.

Simultaneously updating Kropotkin's social-ecological endeavours, and showing where they fall short and can be brought radically further, Bookchin draws on twentieth-century developments in the natural sciences to indicate the extraordinary extent to which life-forms engage in 'symbiosis' or 'mutualism' to support each other and shape their eco-systems in their favour. Thus, Kropotkin's identification of *intra*-specific mutual aid is extended to *inter*-specific mutual aid. And thus, Bookchin systematically assaults the greatest apologia ever articulated for the emergence of the state, capital and hierarchy itself. And though Bookchin is highly critical of Marshall Sahlins' (1972) “original affluent society” thesis on the basis that it idealises a stone age world “totally lacking in evolutionary promise” (Bookchin 1991:58), he emphasises the bankruptcy of commonsense and economistic conceptions of 'needs' such as those implicated in Marxian approaches to 'scarcity'<sup>58</sup> – paying homage to Karl Polanyi's observation that:

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58 However, as much as Bookchin distances himself from Sahlins' thesis, in his critique of the notion of scarcity it is difficult not to think of Sahlins' account of the leisurely ambience of 'primitive' life, as well as other accounts, such as those of anarchist anthropologist Pierre Clastres (1977), of the ease with which certain horticulturalist tribes in the Amazon procure the means of life. Funnily enough, both Sahlins' and Clastres' accounts have been highly influential amongst the 'primitivists' and anti-civilisationists who often associate themselves with anarchism (another dimension of the curious anarchy-anthropology axis). No doubt Bookchin's motivation to distance himself from Sahlins' thesis – in the form of a footnote appended to the 1991 edition of *The Ecology of Freedom* – was a reflection of his even stronger urge to distance himself from primitivism, a major bogeyman for Bookchin in the 1990s.

Rational action as such is the relating of ends to means; economic rationality, specifically, assumes means to be scarce. But human society involves more than that. What should be the end of man, and how should he choose his means?

Economic rationalism, in the strict sense, has no answer to these questions, for they imply motivations and valuations of a moral and practical order that go beyond the logically irresistible, but otherwise empty exhortation to be 'economical' (Polanyi 1977:13, quoted in Bookchin 1991:68).

And although – philosophical questions about the nature of needs aside – productivity, surpluses and population can be shown to have increased significantly in the early Neolithic era, Bookchin rejects any suggestion of causal links between this fact and the emergence of class society. Class society, after all, is based on principles of private property and of accumulation, whereas there is every reason to believe, according to Bookchin, that the prospect of such forms would have been even more anathema to the values of pre-hierarchical “organic society” – and would have generated even more resistance – than the assault on custom and the imposition of “free market” relations on pre-capitalist English agrarian society, as documented by Polanyi. Bookchin draws on the evidence of just what appears to happen when highly communal societies are faced with the problem (for a problem is just what it resembles) of surplus: with wealth differentials being viewed as highly problematical in such societies, it is not accumulation but *dis*-accumulation to which people seem to 'instinctively' find recourse – quite nakedly in practices such as the potlatch ceremonies of the Indians of what is now north-west USA, and more elaborately, argues Bookchin, in the waves of spectacular public works such as the pyramids of Egypt and the ziggurats of Mesopotamia (Bookchin 1991:72-73).<sup>59 60</sup>

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59 To this we might append some of the examples cited by Graeber of attitudes towards wealth accumulation in many non-'Western' societies. In Mauss's “gift economies”, for example, social organisation seems to have, in many ways, been geared towards preventing enterprising individuals from gaining too much wealth and power (Graeber 2004:22); while in certain egalitarian societies marked by institutions of “imaginary counterpower” (as understood by Graeber – see below), such as that of the Tiv of central Nigeria (Graeber 2004:28) and in highland Madagascar (Graeber 2004:29), the will to accumulate wealth is equated with consumption by elaborately (and gruesomely) conceived supernatural ills.

60 It might be pointed out that there are some deficiencies in this component of Bookchin's argument: he expends some energy trying to show that the forms of class society could not simply have generated (or perhaps, 'accumulated') themselves out of a situation of increasing surpluses in 'material' terms, and in terms of “manpower”, along the lines I summarise above; but this is after expending considerably more energy arguing that it is not simply to the origins of capital and class that radicals should be looking in their attempts to understand the roots of domination, but to the very origins of hierarchy itself, which only much later mutated into class and capitalist forms. Thus, even if Bookchin's argument

As Bookchin scotches the notion of scarcity, and the relationship posited between scarcity and the emergence of hierarchical society, he inverts much of what many “class struggle” Marxists and anarchists have taken for granted in conceptualising the historical development of capitalism and other forms of domination; along the way, declaring that “I am asking not if the notion of dominating nature gave rise to the domination of human by human, but rather if the domination of human by human gave rise to the notion of dominating nature” (Bookchin 1991:66). This approach opens gateways to radically

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that class society could not have emerged out of a situation of surplus is convincing, within the terms of *his own* explanatory project – in this instance, to explain the emergence of hierarchy – it is difficult to see how this observation is of much use. Indeed, Bookchin is at pains to point out that pre-capitalist forms of social hierarchy – especially the earliest ones – often had little directly to do with material exploitation or accumulation. More important were notions of prestige and social (as opposed to a much narrower ‘economic’) contrast, often favouring “display over personal wealth, generosity over acquisition, hardiness over comfort, and self-denial over luxury. It is the former traits, rather than the latter, that elevate the “well-born” over the “ill-born.” Much that passes for luxury in the precapitalist world was a lavish exhibition of power rather than pleasure” (Bookchin 1991:72). Of course, these traits are thoroughly compatible with the largesse, self-denial, and spectacle associated with many examples of disaccumulation (including Bookchin's).

Funnily enough, Bookchin does not seem to engage with what might be considered a more important point of the Marxist thesis regarding scarcity and the emergence of class forms: not that class would grow out of surplus, but that surplus – or rather abundance – was predicated on the development of class forms in the first place (this is again based on the assumption that social stratification would lead to better social organisation, division of labour and so on). Indeed, there are troubling things to consider here for anarchists. In the Ancient Near East, for example, as anarchist anthropologist Harold Barclay points out, technological developments such as the plough and wheeled vehicles, as well as the use of domesticated animals to draw them, appear to have arisen almost coterminously with the state. Other “technological determinist” accounts of state formation seem shakier, for example Wittfogel's “hydraulic civilisations” thesis, positing a correlation between the need to co-ordinate complex irrigation systems and the emergence of centralized state apparatuses (see Barclay 2003:60-62). Barclay points out the many shortcomings of this thesis, not least the fact that in some of Wittfogel's examples, state formation well predates innovations in irrigation; thus, the former did not arise to manage the latter (Barclay 2003:61-62). But as with so many other examples of technological innovations – and even much of the fabric of the world as we know it, such as urban living – this leaves us to ask, would these innovations have arisen *without* the state and social stratification?

As for the other side of this coin, the question of class society's *origins* in surplus – while the incidences of surplus behind Bookchin's examples of disaccumulation may not *explain* the emergence of hierarchy per se, it is difficult not to see surplus as at least an important factor in *facilitating* the emergence of social stratification. As Barclay puts it, *vis-à-vis* the productive and population increases associated with early advances in horticulture and agriculture: “There are several reasons why a complex horticulture or agriculture is fundamental to state development. Early gardening was not much more productive or efficient than gathering and hunting, but as people became more dependent on domesticated plants and animals, yields increased because of the effort in improving seed and agricultural techniques. Not only did this allow for much larger populations, but it also permitted a few individuals to become specialists in given tasks and not be engaged in the production of their food. What is more, it laid the groundwork for a tiny minority to become a leisure class of administrators and aristocrats” (Barclay 2003:62).

reinterpreting various histories – which brings us back to our project of working out how autonomist historical endeavours might be disentangled from some of their excess Marxist theoretical baggage, and extended to much more “fecund” historical vistas.

### **The history of the world turned upside down**

Historiographical endeavours linked with autonomism have been heralded as breaking new ground in uncovering histories of working class agency and autonomy marginalised from traditional 'class struggle' and Marxist narratives, and even from 'classical' histories-from-below. To return to the example of Linebaugh and Rediker's massively acclaimed (no doubt rightly so) work, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000), commentators have celebrated its projection of the 'history-from-below' spotlight onto what might be called episodes at the “threshold of history” as far as modern capitalism and the modern proletariat are concerned. Jon Beasley-Murray suggests that the book can be seen as a riposte or corrective to (amongst other things) the practice of focusing on the historical multitudes only at those points where they become recognisable as the modern working class – or even, the ethnically homogeneous working classes of histories written along national lines (for Beasley-Murray, constituting a “veiled critique” on the part of the authors of the imposing (and influential) shadow of E.P. Thompson). In reclaiming the transnational and trans-ethnic history of the “Atlantic proletariat” of the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Linebaugh and Rediker seek to show that working class history did *not* begin with the developments documented in *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1963).

But is there not a strange contradiction in Linebaugh and Rediker's project? On the one hand, they seek to reclaim experiences of resistance marginalised from historical investigations framed by overly narrow conceptions of what working class history is. On the other hand, they at times seem to justify the significance of their objects of study on the basis of their prefigurative proletarian-'ness', as in this account of the 1768 London riots (from their earlier (1996) article also called “The Many-Headed Hydra”):



In many ways, the riots of the spring and summer of 1768 appear to be classic instances of the eighteenth-century plebeian “mob” in action: the forms..., the heterogeneity of the “trades”..., and, generally, the subordination of its demands and actions to the middle-class reform movement led by John Wilkes. Yet the activities of that year need to be seen not only as the licensed outrages of the plebeian mob, but as something new, unlicensed, insurrectionary, and proletarian.

Thus, the problem of Marxian working class histories such as those of Thompson<sup>61</sup> is seen not as their giving of precedence to the modern working class at the expense of pre-proletarian social formations, and pre-proletarian resistance to domination, but as their lack of depth in recognising the real historical scope of proletarian resistance – with origins further back in time, thoroughly inchoate, but recognisably proletarian, so long as we look hard enough. I have stated earlier that autonomists have been enthusiastic in pushing the boundaries of the historical scape of working class struggle. But with reference points such as Linebaugh and Rediker's work, it appears that these boundaries will only get pushed so far, and in a sense, fairly orthodox Marxian criteria for the study of history remain intact, albeit with their parameters adjusted; the same criteria that have allowed generations of Marxist historians to contemptuously write off pre-proletarian plebeian uprisings as “millenarian”, “reactionary” and “atavistic” (see e.g. Hobsbawm 1959) – what Marx would have dismissed as “old shit”, no doubt.

The horizons of this adjusted historical field of vision are signposted in Cleaver's (1993) discussion of the parallels between autonomism and the work of Kropotkin; here, Linebaugh and Rediker's work makes up the farthest historical threshold:

Just as Kropotkin studied the past to inform the present, so have these autonomist Marxists. Where Kropotkin went back to the French Revolution and the Commune, these researchers have explored moments of class conflict and working class self-activity such as the liberation of London's Newgate Prison in 1780, the slave revolt in San Domingo in 1791, the IWW struggles in the 1910s, the German workers'

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61 Of course, as Thompson's widow points out (Thompson 2001), as his career wore on, Thompson became increasingly ambivalent about referring to his work as “Marxist”; rather, he preferred to say that he worked “within a Marxist tradition”.

councils in 1918 and 1919, the industrial mass-worker sit-downs of the 1930s, the Italian factory worker revolt against the unions in the 1950s, the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956; the student and women's movement of the 1960s, the struggles of peasants and the urban poor in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s, and so on.

But what is stopping us from going further? The appeal of doing so is obvious – for the broader the chunk of human history and experience that we include within our scope, the more, and richer, the opportunities for testing, extending and innovating when it comes to theorising about domination, about resistance to domination, and about what autonomists would call “self-valorisation”, what Kropotkin would call the future unfolding itself within the present, and what Bookchin would call the potentiality for freedom and consciousness – and so on and so forth.<sup>62</sup>

The answer, I think, is “baggage”; autonomists are not just interested in any old resistance to domination, they are interested in *proletarian* resistance to domination. But what does this mean?

When we take the view that, historically, resistance to domination only becomes interesting when it mutates and becomes “proletarian”, in response to the parallel mutation generating modern capitalism above it, are we not reproducing the mirror image of the Western bourgeois ideology that, as Graeber (2004:46) points out, takes for granted that at a certain point “in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries, a Great Transformation occurred, that it occurred in Western Europe and its settler colonies, and that because of it, we became “modern””? Are we not taking it for granted that between these “proletarian” histories and the rest of human experience, there exists a fundamental rupture? That we have nothing to learn from what went before (or alongside)?

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<sup>62</sup> I must point out here that I would not, of course, presume to declare these three different approaches as identical or interchangeable – that would be extremely crude – but I would say that these three approaches, though different, are grasping towards the same truths.

How secure are these boundaries? Linebaugh and Rediker show them to be muddy – as Cleaver points out, their work shows that proletarian struggle pre-dates the 'hegemony' of the wage, for example. But should a continuity between what we recognise as the modern manifestation of the wage system, and previous forms of exploitation and domination, be surprising? Graeber (2004:71) points out, for instance, that whereas certain anthropologists have spilled some ink arguing that slavery can usefully be viewed as an arcane form of the modern capitalist wage labour system, it is even easier, in theoretical terms, to view the wage as a modern version of slavery.

This is certainly not to suggest that there are not important distinctions to be made when we try to understand history. Indeed, to cite Graeber yet again, attempts to theorise capitalism too broadly – say, simply in terms of commercial and financial praxis – can be found to be extremely wanting. By such definitions, capitalism can be understood as something as old almost as history, and something found in every “civilisation” on the historical record. But such ways of framing capitalism hold out little explanatory power when it comes to the practices that have gone hand in hand with “actually-existing” modern capitalism: this is the history of imperialism and genocide, and of a subordination of human life and natural environment to profit otherwise unparalleled in human experience. This would seem to be rather another animal – a 'totalizing system' of sorts, founded not just upon the principle of buying and selling, but on the “connection between a wage system and a principle of the never-ending pursuit of profit for its own sake” (Graeber 2004:50).

But while systems of domination change and evolve across spatial and temporal horizons, human beings are still human beings; and while we certainly need to understand every specific incarnation of domination on its own terms, that does not mean that there are not ubiquitous and even innate inclinations towards “self-valorisation” present across humanity, that do *not* change – which would mean that certain areas of human experience might be worth exploring, even if they are not “proletarian”.

Also, in working out our criteria for what is worthy of study, it is important that we ask ourselves where we are coming from. Are we coming at history and so on from an anti-capitalist perspective? Or are the principles behind our research broader? An anarchist research project, for instance, would surely seek to understand not just how capitalism works, but how hierarchy and domination in general work – as well as their counter-images.

Some of Bookchin's work can be seen in this spirit. For Bookchin, the logical route to areas of history marginalised by Marxists is via his rejection of the Marxist principle of scarcity. With the scarcity principle scuttled, incipient class society can be viewed not as a 'necessary evil' in humanity's striving to transcend its battle for survival, but as an unnecessary and unjust imposition upon humanity. Accordingly, pre-proletarian resistance to incipient class society can be seen not as a backward-looking and reactionary enterprise, but as an honourable struggle against this unjust imposition; and not just as an 'honourable-but-hopelessly quixotic' struggle, the kind of characterisation that a traditional Marxist in a sympathetic mood might manage, but as the very key to understanding the human potential for freedom.

In Bookchin's account, humanity's struggles for freedom have been about as far away from the 'negativity' identified by Holloway as it is possible to imagine. A “backward look” is indeed a recurring feature of such struggles, but more than a negative or reactionary recalcitrance to the 'progress' of class society, it can be seen as an orientation to one human potentiality – that towards freedom – overtaken by the ascension of another potentiality dialectically opposed to it – that towards hierarchy and domination; the latter on the up-and-up since the emergence of hierarchical social forms.

And while this immanent drive towards freedom is a constant, its articulation has changed over time. Some of the traditions generated by it are revealing. As for the “backward look”, for instance – not so much one contextually specific tradition, but a 'tradition' springing up in different times and places – Bookchin argues that in some contexts it can be seen as a signpost to residual memories of pre-hierarchical society. (As

Bookchin (1991:194) points out, where the oldest recorded popular uprisings are concerned, such as in Egypt and Sumer around 2500 B.C., it is conceivable that “the memory of tribal life may have still permeated the reality of “civilisation”.) Bookchin traces this theme from the first known record of the word “freedom” – appearing as *amargi* – literally, “return to the mother” – in a Sumerian cuneiform tablet documenting a far-reaching popular revolt thousands of years ago (Bookchin 1991:168). This can be connected to the motif of the past “golden age” colouring so many rebellions right through the middle ages in Europe – this temporal notion finding its spatial expression in the utopian ideal best known under the name of the land of Cockayne. Widespread literal belief in the land of Cockayne as a thoroughly anarchic paradise lying to the west of Europe links this theme, for Bookchin, with pre-Christian and “Celtic” traditions, which, refusing to be extinguished amongst common people, forced the Christian church to weave the narrative of St. Brendan's voyage around them. For Bookchin, these revolutionary impulses are the true seedbed for even more obviously central themes of pre-industrial popular culture in Europe: that of the “world turned upside down”, for example, which, as Bookchin might have added, animated the anarchic institution of carnival, until ruling elites – always deeply ambivalent about the social 'function' and meaning of carnival – eventually resolved to, and succeeded in, suppressing carnival's most volatile elements (see e.g. Burke 1978, ch. 7). Other particularly fertile soils for the growth of far-reaching ideals of freedom have lain in heretical and dissident religious movements on the margins of Christianity.

Thus, Bookchin offers us a way out of the Marxist-Victorian-bourgeois frame for viewing human experience, particularly as it applies to history. And if this endeavour is more about transcending temporal horizons, David Graeber's attempts to escape such conceptual prisons have more to do with spatial ones. While Bookchin's arguments represent an assault on the notion that the histories of pre-proletarian anti-systemic struggle are only tangentially interesting, Graeber assaults the idea that people in “complex” societies have nothing tangible to learn from the experiences of “kin-based”, that is non-“complex”, societies. In particular, Graeber targets the idea that those of us in the “West” are living in a qualitatively different world to those outside it, now or in the

past. There are certainly quantitative changes in abundance, particularly ones associated with technological innovation; and of course, our world represents a patchwork of disparate and diverse cultures. But while distinctions drawn socially, politically, morally, and in terms of consciousness, are the basis for our ability to talk about cultural difference (and are the basis for the existence of disciplines such as anthropology), is it really possible to identify a *fundamental* difference along these lines between the monoliths of 'West' and 'non-West', or between "(post)modern" and "kin-based" societies? The point is not that cultural differences do not abound; they do, and they do between places in the "West" and non-"West"; but they also do between one city neighbourhood in Western Europe and another coterminous one, and between adjacent but wildly different tribes in the Amazon (such as Pierre Clastres' Amazonian "anarchists" and their neighbours, the warlike and decidedly hierarchical Sherente (Graeber 2004:54); while, beneath more or less superficial and quantitative differences, it ought to be remembered that "Not only do we, in industrial societies, still have kinship (and cosmologies); other societies have social movements and revolutions" (Graeber 2004:54).

I have suggested that Bookchin's account of the drives toward domination and freedom in human society is potentially useful in thinking about the question of 'negative' and 'positive' struggle. In particular, Bookchin's challenge to the notion of natural scarcity throws into question much of the Marxist framework that imparts a 'negative' handicap – an 'original sin' of sorts – to the historical struggle for freedom from the outset. In Bookchin's account, this struggle is not seen as reactionary, but as one pole of a dialectical struggle between opposing human potentialities. Meanwhile, Graeber's analysis, starting from slightly different premises to Bookchin, and predicated on a refusal to compartmentalise humanity along lines such as "modern" and non-"modern", points towards a view of such struggles that is perhaps more truly dialectical. It is not clear that Graeber shares Bookchin's belief that the development of social hierarchy constituted a great turning point in human history, before which society operated on an egalitarian basis. (Critiquing primitivist thought (as Bookchin had done so many times before him), he opines "I do not think we're losing much if we admit that humans never

really lived in the garden of Eden” (Graeber 2004:54).) In place of such a grand narrative, Graeber posits a relentless, shifting interplay between – as he puts it – “power” and “counterpower”. Graeber sees the dynamic of this interplay as animating human history: “... “societies” are constantly reforming, skipping back and forth between what we think of as different evolutionary stages” (Graeber 2004:54); “... it is becoming increasingly clear that most of human history was characterized by continual social change. Rather than timeless groups living for thousands of years in their ancestral territories, new groups were being created, and old ones dissolving, all the time. Many of what we have come to think of as tribes, or nations, or ethnic groups were originally collective projects of some sort” (Graeber 2004:56). Some of these are revolutionary, “Some are egalitarian, others are about promoting a certain vision of authority or hierarchy” (*Ibid.*).

Counterpower, then, is for Graeber roughly equivalent to Bookchin's “potentiality for freedom”. But I think that we can also draw distinctions between the two concepts – and I think that these distinctions come out when we attempt to relate the respective concepts to Holloway's conception of negative struggle against power – what he calls “anti-power”. Of course, Bookchin's account of the potentiality for freedom goes against Holloway's anti-power in certain respects: whereas Holloway sees anti-power as the more or less latent resistance to the logic of capitalist power in which humanity is imprisoned, Bookchin's analysis takes a rather different starting point, seeing the potentiality for freedom as historically a driving force for humanity; its subordination to its dialectical opposite, the potentiality towards domination, being a historical phenomenon, the product of what Cox and Nilsen (2005; 2006) would call the struggle between “social movements from above and below” – but hardly an inevitability. Thus, attributing positive and negative characters to these opposing potentialities is hardly appropriate, especially considering that if anything, the drive towards domination represents, if not a 'reaction' to, then at least an imposition upon, a more egalitarian humanity of times long past.

Graeber's account of counterpower, on the other hand, has no need to appeal to a pre-

hierarchical 'golden age' in eschewing any attempts to pigeonhole resistance to domination as negative. Graeber transcends the navel-gazing of much scholarly speculation on such matters by poring over the ethnographic record to sketch an image of counterpower as a living, breathing and vital dialectical force within human society – not to mention a reflexive and negotiated one. This counterpower can be found not only in the fonts of creative and insurrectionary energy that seem to come out of nowhere and embrace whole populations in times of social upheaval – nor only in the outwardly invisible reservoirs of latent creative energy lying in the background to such upsurges (what Negri, as Graeber (2004:36) points out, would call “constituent power”) – but also in the popular institutions of egalitarian societies. In this context, Graeber identifies counterpower as the “predominant form of social power. It stands guard over what are seen as frightening possibilities within the society itself: notably against the emergence of systematic forms of political or economic dominance” (Graeber 2004:35). For after all, when we remember Graeber's point about what we might call the dynamic of societal 'recomposition' animating history – how egalitarian societies built around counterpower appear to arise very consciously out of the ashes, or on the margins, of tyranny – we can also imagine how much the latter form of counterpower is conditioned by a given community's real-life and historical experience of domination. In light of this dialectical pattern, Holloway's point about the negative nature of anti-power seems... well, beside the point.

But it is no accident that anti-power, in Holloway's account, is a more restrained force than Graeber's counterpower. Coming from an anthropological perspective, Graeber's account of counterpower is informed by ethnographic studies of societies where counterpower can very legitimately be identified as the “predominant form of social power”, after all (Graeber 2004:35). Holloway's analysis, for all its urges to transcend traditional conceptual straitjackets (in particular Marxist ones), and for all its orientations to struggles outside the capitalist core, remains limited to looking out from the mouth of capitalist hegemony's (and “modernity”'s) whale; it draws on no such resources as Graeber.



On the one hand, then, Graeber's is a more well-rounded account of antagonism towards power. But on the other hand, what about those of us who are *not* living in 'counterpower societies', and who *are* trapped inside the whale of capitalist hegemony? For those of us for whom Graeber's popular institutions of counterpower seem like a distant, exotic dream, is Holloway's analysis of anti-power more relevant? In these societies has counterpower as a more or less articulated, institutionalised force been extinguished, leaving only the instinct, or the potentiality for such developments to unfold, intact? Is it possible, indeed, to see in all this a *passage* from counterpower to mere anti-power?

Perhaps. But rather than seeing counterpower and anti-power as two fundamentally different manifestations of the same potentiality, I think it would also be possible to encapsulate anti-power as one form within a broad conceptualisation of counterpower. To do so, we might first need to refresh our memories as to the contingent nature of capitalist hegemony; Graeber points out that, "In highly unequal societies, imaginary counterpower often defines itself against certain aspects of dominance that are seen as particularly obnoxious and can become an attempt to eliminate them from social relations completely. When it does, it becomes revolutionary" (Graeber 2004:36). Is this not reminiscent of moments such as "1968"? Such moments have often, in many ways, been defeated, and have not gone all the way in achieving revolution – as 'revolution' is normally understood. But their legacies have been monumental; their 'objective' origins lying in no small part in desires to challenge some of life's most 'obnoxious aspects of dominance' – such as the authoritarianism of higher education (see Lumley 1990) and of changing workplaces (see Katsiaficas 1987:95-97) and the oppressiveness of gender and race relations – the movements of "1968" moved (arguably forever) the goalposts determining how social relations could work in the capitalist core, ushering in an era in which at least a *rhetoric* of openness and libertarian values moved towards a 'centre-of-gravity' position, in terms of how people viewed their world.<sup>63</sup> And the extent to which such developments were eventually co-opted and incorporated within the hegemonic

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63 Of course, we also need to factor into this picture the counter-offensive of social movements from above, such as the 'New Right' and neoliberalism – but the power of the 1968 moment is actually reflected in the forms of this counter-offensive, such as the libertarian rhetoric upon which Reaganism and the phenomenon of 'hippy-to-yuppie' relied, as well as the emphasis on individuality and self-development accompanying the free market and consumerist ideology of neoliberalism.

arrangements of capitalist governance cannot, somehow, retrospectively, cancel out the power that they manifested.

Of course, this is to turn the economic interpretation of “1968” and its associated 'cultural revolution' as discussed above – and as propagated by Clarke *et al* (1976) – on its head. This is to suggest that the events of these years were *not* determined by the 'requirements' of a changing mode of production, but rather by people, and by people's desires to change the world around them to meet their needs (not just narrowly conceived economic 'needs', but also 'needs' to live in some degree of self-determination and dignity (see Katsiaficas 1987:95-97)); the medium for all of this being counterpower. So what are the implications of this for the questions I have asked in this chapter?

### **Counter culture and counterpower**

I asked how we should relate to our 'counter cultural heritage', continuous as it is with the “1968” moment. One obvious answer at this point is that, rather than reject it as the now meaningless residue of a hegemonic crisis long past – riddled as it is with contradictions and problems, some of which I have tried to outline – we should pay great attention to it. For 'hegemonic crises' do not simply involve 'superstructure' doing the bidding of 'base'. While they can appear to come out of nowhere, they are in fact the eruptions of the counterpower lying at all times just beneath the veneer of social consensus. Such forces are not the kinds of things that simply evaporate when a given hegemonic crisis is 'over'. Thus, for leftists – unless we wish to completely turn our backs on social reality and delve further into cocoons of absurd and esoteric doctrinal debates – the legacies and residues of such phenomena are not things to be ignored, but things to be chased after like butterflies, in the hope that we can understand them.

This would be an obvious answer. But here I must raise the question of the distinction between 'counter culture' and 'counterpower'. In effect, I have suggested justifying attention to counter culture on the basis that hegemonic crises are not islands – they are

surrounded by counterpower – so if counter culture is the visible legacy of a hegemonic crisis, it must be the counterpower that we are looking for. But at that rate, what 'surrounded' the hegemonic crisis in question on the 'other side', as it were? If counter culture was the obvious manifestation of this counterpower *in the wake of* (as well as during)<sup>64</sup> the hegemonic crisis, what did the counterpower that *preceded* the hegemonic crisis – and that presumably provided the “constituent power”<sup>65</sup> for everything that made up that hegemonic crisis – look like?

And therein lies the question! For nothing distinguishes the counterpower and anti-power described by Graeber and Holloway more than their very elusiveness, or even invisibleness. Of course, the counterpower as found in what might be called Graeber's 'counterpower societies' is tangible enough; but outside such societies, and in societies such as our own, it is as difficult to imagine what Graeber's counterpower might look like as it is difficult to visualise Holloway's anti-power – which he in fact *defines* in relation to its 'shadowiness'.

We could, of course, try to work backwards: if we accept the counter cultural moment, and the counter cultural legacy, of 1968, as at least examples of the *constituted* counterpower of that world-historical movement (we should not assume that this 'example' encompasses all aspects of the counterpower involved in this moment), then we could look for precedents or antecedents in the period running up to the world-historical movement's actualisation. This does not promise to be easy; where in this 'haystack' would we start, and what features of counter culture would we isolate and try to pick out in the prelude to 1968?

We could try 'youth'. For while the moment of “1968” involved the *telescoping* of an

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64 Need to make this clearer in footnote? i.e. point out that the hegemonic crisis was not confined to the year, and the outbreaks of, 1968, and that in a sense counter culture was the form of this hegemonic crisis. It could be said that the 'crisis' – 1968 – came out of counter culture, so that counter culture was the manifestation of counter power from which the crisis sprang, but I look at counter culture as being the crisis itself, so the task is to figure out where this came from.

65 As indicated above, Graeber (2004:36) points out that this concept of Negri's – analogous to the “notorious popular ability to innovate entirely new politics, economic and social forms” in “times of radical transformation” – can be seen as one element of counterpower.

almost inconceivably heterogeneous array of different 'types' of people, in different 'types' of struggles, I think it is reasonable enough to hypothesize that the embodiment of this process, and its legacies, was in the movement of youth – from the students who provided much of the initiative in the “war of movement” (Gramsci 1971) period of 1968, to the drop-out and autonomist cultures that during and after this time flourished in North America and Western Europe (and survived in the latter – in some cases up to the present (see Katsiaficas 1997)).

So, what of youth as an antagonistic social force in the pre-”1968” period? A literature connecting 'post-war' youth subcultures with anti-systemic resistance does exist; but it is not a literature that (to my knowledge!) gets related in any serious way to the study of “1968” – or, for that matter, to the study of youth, and the counter culture of youth, as forces implicated in that moment. But what is stopping us from doing so?

## **Youth culture and counterpower**

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's (eds.) *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976), for instance, is surely the single most important work on this landscape, collecting as it does a range of texts coming out of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies milieu – the 'Birmingham School'. The book describes youth cultures which have formed as autonomous spaces from the dominant culture, where members can set their own values, rationalities and identities. Thus, on at least a symbolic level, members win back control over their lives from the rubrics of social and cultural power. From this point, we could take one step forward and understand all of this in terms of self-valorisation; and we could take another and view this self-valorisation as an aspect of Graeber's counterpower. Here I will try to illustrate what I mean. Below, Graeber reflects on the curious turn of events whereby the unquestioned popular legitimacy of such forms of domination as slavery and monarchy evaporated within a generation of 'regime change' in rural Madagascar<sup>66</sup> (colonization by the French put the indigenous monarchy out of the picture

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66 The site of Graeber's own fieldwork.

in 1895), and on the ease with which the population subsequently adapted to what was effectively anarchy with the collapse of the local state in the 1980s:

The puzzling question is how such profound changes could happen so fast? The likely answer is that they really didn't; there were things going on even under the nineteenth-century kingdom of which foreign observers (even those long resident on the island) were simply unaware... This, I would argue, is what the ongoing existence of deeply embedded forms of counterpower allows. A lot of the ideological work, in fact, of making a revolution was conducted precisely in the spectral nightworld of sorcerers and witches; in redefinitions of moral implications of different forms of magical power. But this only underlines how these spectral zones are always the fulcrum of the moral imagination, a kind of reservoir, too, of potential revolutionary change. It's precisely from these invisible spaces – invisible, most of all, to power – whence the potential for insurrection, and the extraordinary social creativity that seems to emerge out of nowhere in revolutionary moments, actually comes. (Graeber 2004:34)

At first glance, this portrait might not seem to have much in common with Hall *et al's* youth subcultures (goths and pentagram-worshippers came to the UK a couple of decades later, after all). Those groups may not have been 'all about' magic and insurrection; but what they *did* represent were spaces autonomous from the dominant culture and ideology, where new values could be elaborated; even, potentially, values of revolution.

The obvious objection to this statement being: “Yes, but what revolution? Graeber was talking about autonomous spaces that *were* implicated in (what he considers) some or other revolution; these examples were not, so it's hardly the same thing!”

A fair point; so it is now to this question – of these youth subcultures' relationship to revolutionary currents – that I will now turn.

## **Youth cultures and revolution**

Even if my argument that Hall *et al's* youth subcultures represent examples of

counterpower is accepted, it is not yet clear how *this* counterpower fits into my broader project here; that is, to find not just random examples of counterpower, but to relate them to one another in the context of hegemonic crises such as “1968”, and to the processes leading to such moments.

This may not be easy: for example, while Hall *et al* do briefly discuss, and consider interesting, the “counter-culture”, they draw a line between it and the youth subcultures they are primarily concerned with; the “counter-culture”, for them (as discussed above), being an organically bourgeois phenomenon, and of a rather different nature to the thoroughly *working class* youth subcultures. For another thing, Hall *et al*'s subcultures seem deeply embedded in the (seemingly quite parochial) cadence of British working class life; with “1968” and counter culture being highly internationalist and cosmopolitan phenomena, it is not clear how we could imagine links between them and this British experience – and this is not to mention the fact that Britain was somewhat marginal to the 1968 movement.

But despite the peculiarities of the British situation – and despite the tendency of British researchers to treat all things British, and in particular English, as astonishingly unique – we might think of EP Thompson's (1978) exhortation to remember that, yes, Britain *is* an island; but that surrounding that island are seas, and on the other sides of those seas lie “Other Countries”. And we might recall that, no matter how peculiar the forms of the youth phenomenon in post-war Britain might seem, they were part of a much more global whole. For while we may laugh at Abbie Hoffman's claim that “Youth is a class” (quoted in Clarke *et al* (1976)) (along with the batch of sociologists identified by Clarke *et al* (1976) as making similar arguments – as Mannheim (1952) did in his own way), we should also bear in mind that across the capitalist 'core' in the post-war decades, adolescent youth represented an emergent social force – the protagonists of the “generation gap”. The process by which youth emerged as a distinctive identity has been diffuse, disparate and fragmentary in terms of time, space and form<sup>67</sup> – while both it and

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67 Not to mention hotly debated – with some sociologists pointing to the nineteenth century and some historians pointing to sixteenth-century France. But I think that the sensible thing to do here is to defer

its wider social impact have been deeply ambiguous in their meaning: youth movements have at various times, and often simultaneously, been seen as deviant and marginal, *as well as* paradoxically emblematic of social change – or even as *leading* social and cultural change in a 'vanguard' fashion.<sup>68</sup> From this perspective, the idea that post-war British 'working class' youth subcultures could be sectioned off and treated as anything other than one part of a global phenomenon, does not, I think, look very credible.

To attempt to explain why all of this happened, and why all of this happened the way it did and when it did – or even to outline the arguments around which this area of study turns – would be beyond the scope of my purposes here. But if such explication is not possible, some interpretation may be; and in such a spirit, would it not be reasonable to extend the general outlines of Hall *et al's* subcultural analysis onto this whole vista? To suggest that this entire post-war generational drift – from the *Rock Around the Clock* riots of the mid-fifties, to Clarke *et al's* UK subcultures, to sixties counter culture, to the punk movement from the 1970s on, etc. – hinged on the need felt by young people to resist, however symbolically, the cultural and social strictures imposed upon them by Fordist capitalism, and to elaborate their own values and ways of life? Above all, to transcend the mind-numbing misery, boredom, alienation and discipline that constituted the most formidable social fact achieved within the parameters of capitalist hegemony.

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to Clarke *et al's* point that, while we do not want to be so ahistorical as to forget that there have been youth subcultures in the past, we also do not want to make the opposite mistake of assuming that if that is the case, there mustn't be any qualitative difference between that history and more recent 'generation gaps' – the myopia-inducing trap of seeing history cyclically.

68 Clarke *et al* emphasised the profoundly ambiguous way in which youth subcultures were received by the mass media: groups such as the Mods got the full 'folk devils'/ 'moral panic' treatment on the very same pages that courted them as a stylistic *avant-garde*. By the same strokes, capitalists, thoroughly incapable of setting trends, came to rely upon the forms of youth culture as templates for commodity production in the era of ephemeral consumption and the centrality of the culture industries. An obvious outcome of this process is that, today, youth is the reference point by which all popular and mass culture must define itself. And there are other layers, I think, to the curiously emblematic position the category of youth has held with respect to the rest of the social totality. Consider Lumley's (1990:296) discussion of the Italian "movement of '77":

"The novelty of the new movement sprang from its assertion of a 'youth identity', which had been repressed or displaced in the student and worker politics of the late sixties and early seventies. But that identity was not perceived exclusively in terms of a youth experience or situation; rather it was taken to be emblematic of a situation typical of the modern metropolis. Youth was made to signify exclusion, marginality, and deviance."

This, of course, is to collapse the distinction drawn by Clarke *et al* (and routinely reproduced elsewhere) between the disaffiliation of working class youth from the dominant culture, obvious from the 1950s or so onwards, and the ostensibly more middle class, and more bohemian, “counter-cultural” disaffiliation visible from the mid-1960s (albeit not without its precedents in the previous decade); and this is, in so doing, to frame these developments in terms of “self-valorisation” and of counterpower.<sup>69</sup>

I asked at the start of this chapter how participants in oppositional social movements might relate to their counter cultural heritage. Later on, I suggested that one potential answer might be that, since counter culture can, I think, be seen as being cut from the cloth of counterpower, and since counterpower is the stuff of hegemonic ruptures, it would be expedient to pay serious attention to the edifice of counter culture, rather than turn away from it. But I also suggested that something seemed to be missing from that answer; not least because counter culture is not the whole story of counterpower.

I think that, if my collapsing of the distinction between what is seen as counter culture, and what are seen as non-counter cultural post-war youth movements, is accepted, this would modify my above 'potential answer' as such: we should not only pay attention to counter culture as a matrix of counterpower, but we should seek to understand the entire edifice of popular culture that has been warrened through by the DNA strands of all youth movements that trace their origins to the “generation gap”. For at the heart of these movements' origins lies the impulse – however articulated or non-articulated – to disaffiliate from hegemonic culture, and to carve out new values and new ways of life.

It is, however, extremely difficult to think in this way. In many ways, contemporary culture is defined by mass stupidity and barbarism. And although much of popular culture is glued together by motifs of past youth movements, it is often difficult to see in this anything other than commercial pastiche. Not that people don't try: postmodernists

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<sup>69</sup> Need footnote (or something) discussing implications of this in terms of class also – i.e. I am rejecting the binary opposition drawn between working class and middle class cultures by Clarke *et al* – and implicit in this is my critique of the way we think about this distinction, and about class struggle etc. culturalist conception of class. Class as identity politics. sensitivity.



and practitioners of what is called cultural studies – once a discipline of merit – routinely claim to find “resistance” in “creative consumption”. This is an inane and dangerous practice, at its worst echoing freemarket ideology locating individuality and freedom in just such “creative consumption”, as pointed out by Graeber (2001:x-xii).

Moreover, to even come close to framing contemporary reality as having been, despite appearances, shaped by the struggle of the 'multitude', and to sound remotely like one might be suggesting that the apparent stalemate between humanity and capital masks a latent revolutionary force, is to risk being accused of autonomist predilections towards the creation of “fictional worlds” (Holloway 2005) – of romanticism.

But there is an opposite pitfall here as well: if the way that we think about reality is not sufficiently historical – if, in the way we think, we are 'too close' to our present reality – it becomes easy to take for granted the iron grip of capitalist hegemony, and relegate any “non-subordination” (Holloway 2005) (something less, I think, than “insubordination”) towards this arrangement to a role of 'negativity'. The concept of hegemony is, I think, a useful tool when it comes to imagining sovereignty within advanced capitalism, and in such a context, it may often make sense to view resistance to such arrangements as 'negative'. But this may not always be the case.

Autonomist writer Paulo Virno (2004:111) suggests that we view our present reality as the legacy of a “defeated revolution”:

During the 1960s and 1970s I believe that the Western world experienced a *defeated* revolution – the first revolution aimed not against poverty and backwardness, but against the means of capitalist production, against the Ford assembly-line and wage labour. Post-Fordism, the hybrid forms of life characteristic of the contemporary multitude, is the answer to *this* defeated revolution. Dismissing both Keynesianism and socialist work ethic, post-Fordist capitalism puts forth *in its own way* typical demands of communism: abolition of work, dissolution of the State, etc. Post-Fordism is the communism of capital.

This portrait suggests a different way of viewing the current 'lines in the sand' delineating hegemonic arrangements: not as arbitrarily imposed from above, but as negotiated in the struggle of social movements from above and below. From this viewpoint, it is still possible, of course, to view the “defeated revolution” as a negative struggle against the capitalist organism that would eventually bring it back into containment.

But could we not broaden out Virno's analysis of a defeated revolution against the means of capitalist production in the 1960s and 1970s, to take into account the much more protracted struggles against the means of social and cultural reproduction within capitalism, that run through much of twentieth century history? Starting from a base of Victorian and 'Protestant ethic' values, this timespan has been shaped by the struggles – and victories – fought for the freedom to be gay, to be black, to be a woman, to be young and have a good time, and so on. All of these non-economic (or at least, not directly economic) struggles have been fought for some kind of loosening or 'libertarian-ising' of the oppressive structures of social and cultural reproduction, and they have changed consciousness dramatically. It is now surely a duty of respect to these movements that we remember just what kind of changes they made, and that we try to remember what it must have been like to live in a society where every inch of life was policed by the apparatuses of social and cultural power (not least the church). Of course, this was not a *defeated* revolution – that is the point. It has been successful and far-reaching, but unfinished.

I think that the youth movements, and the way that they shaped popular culture, have been at the heart of this long, unfinished cultural revolution. As with the “defeated revolution” described by Virno, stalemate has been met with the forces of domination, and those forces have issued counter-offensives: they have taken many of the new cultural and social forms innovated by the agents of the cultural revolution, bought them or stolen them, and then sold them back. And then re-hashed them and sold them again and again.

Wherever the popular cultural legacies of these movements stand today in relation to this struggle – and no matter how co-opted they seem – given the historical momentum

weighing in behind them, it seems to me wise to be sceptical as to the idea that their orientations towards freedom and resistance to domination could have dissolved entirely. These are forces with strange inclinations to recur in like form at different places and times, and to self-regenerate when threatened with neutralisation. As Gramsci (1971) points out, while people prop up dominant ideologies on an abstract level, after all, they betray different values on a day-to-day level. Might we not suppose that these day-to-day consciousnesses are profoundly conditioned by these struggles? Taken to their logical conclusion, these values are revolutionary. Could they, then, be the basis for building an 'anti-hegemony'? It is hard to know, since most people do not take such values to their logical conclusions. For most people, insofar as emancipatory values play a part in their lives, they are mired up in the incoherent commonsense and internalised ideology of hegemonic capitalism.

But it is also hard to know, because I have not provided much evidence that when people *do* become 'revolutionaries', such values, as diffused by a popular culture warrenred through by counterpower, have much to do with it. Indeed, such a portrait of radicalization has little to do with how processes of induction into social movements are typically thought to occur.

## Chapter three: (Against) Methodology

### **Introduction**

At the heart of this thesis lies an awkward relation between overarching theoretical concerns, and empirical research project, which, apart from incorporating an element of what Geoghegan (2000) would call “immersed participant observation” – ‘retrospective’ participant observation, drawing on my own past experiences as a participant in the movements that I study – revolves around interviews with seven informants. One way to make sense of this is to explain the logic of how the questions around which the different components of my thesis are built tie into each other, and how these in turn fit into my overarching research question. This, below, I will attempt to do.

However, I think that before I do this, I need to provide a window onto what is possibly another axis of awkwardness at the centre of the thesis; this having to do with its relation between ‘theory’ and ‘methodology’.

### **Anarchism and methodology**

This thesis has an anarchist bent. It takes as its central concern movements that are antagonistic towards capitalism and other systems of power and hierarchy, and in trying to understand how such movements come about, it adopts as key theoretical reference points concepts that originate in anarchist ideas about human society and the human condition, such as those of Bookchin and Graeber.

So, this thesis is, in theoretical terms, of an anarchist orientation to some degree. But does this an ‘anarchist thesis’ make? In other words, is there a particular relationship between the ‘anarchist theory’ dimension of my thesis, and the methodology I have employed? That is, how I have actually gone about doing the research?

In a number of respects, I think that the answer is 'yes'. Firstly, the anarchist theoretical orientation has been reflected from the very start in how I have conceived of the thesis' usefulness – not only in a 'high' sense of contributing to anarchist theory that may sit on a shelf and never be read by any more than a handful of individuals, but in the 'low' sense of thinking about how the research might be fed back into the dialogues and debates of the kind of movements that I am concerned with, and how it might represent a worthwhile contribution to those dialogues and debates. This is what David Graeber (2004:8-9) would call the difference between “high theory” and “low theory”. In my thesis, this principle is reflected in the way that my research literally takes as its starting point certain debates ongoing within oppositional movements, before going on to ask: what are the real issues lying behind those debates? And, how can we adopt those issues to the process of thinking about how oppositional movements constitute themselves?

Of course, there is nothing specifically anarchist about seeking to transcend the role of the traditional intellectual or academic, and seeking to carry out research in ways that reject exhortations to be impartial, disinterested or detached from the interests of those being researched (See Purkis 2001 for an outline of such endeavours from an anarchist perspective; also see Halfacree 1999, also from an activist perspective of sorts, on the efforts of “third space” intellectuals in this regard). But it is amongst such developments to which anarchist researchers must look in trying to establish what are the beacons that might be engaged with in attempting to build an anarchist social sciences project. After all, there really is no such thing as an anarchist sociology, or anthropology, or what have you. Anarchists have always been marginal in academia, so if anarchist schools are to be developed within these disciplines – as advocated in recent years by Purkis (2004) in relation to sociology, and Graeber (2004) in relation to anthropology – it will have to involve widely seeking out already-existing tools congruent with anarchist concerns.

Which leads us on to another question: why try to 'do' anarchist social sciences in the first place? An obvious answer is that anarchists – and other people who oppose capitalism, hierarchy and domination – need theory, just like any group involved in a radical

transformative project.<sup>70</sup> And in looking around for an arena providing the space to do such theoretical and intellectual work, the academy seems like a reasonable place to start. After all, while some elements in oppositional movements adopt an unqualified negative posture towards anything to do with academic research, in reality it is not possible to “sensibly argue that academic work... is of no use to movements”, as pointed out by Barker and Cox (2002), since movements rely on the fruits of such work in myriad ways.

But that is not to say that the rubrics of academic research are not problematic from an anarchist or radical point of view. I suspect that we do not think enough about the most profound effects of the 'academicization' of radical forms of knowledge – the way that when a radical perspective is brought within the fold of an academic discipline, it takes on much of the baggage, assumptions, concerns of that discipline. Holloway (2005) discusses something of this nature with regard to the change in orientation of much Marxist theoretical activity over the twentieth century from a purely negative critique of the contradictions of capitalism, to much more functionalist concerns with social reproduction within capitalism. (This ties into Graeber's (2004; see also 2002) discussion of the strange phenomenon whereby generations of Marxist intellectuals managed to ingratiate themselves into the power structures of academia without ever a whimper of protest as to the way that those power structures operated; a trend that anarchists did not mirror.)

I wonder whether Marx or Gramsci would have been able to do what they did had they found careers as professors of philosophy at the University of Berlin, or London, or Turin. And I wonder, what would a term such as 'anarchist sociology' actually mean? Would it mean sociology carried out with an anarchist tinge, or would it mean an anarchist intellectual project carried out in dialogue with sociological tools? I suspect it would mean the latter, and I wonder how problematic a fact that is.

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70 For a discussion of the dynamics and dialogues linking 'activist' worlds and worlds of 'theory', see Barker and Cox (2002), and Cox and Nilsen (2005b).

My thesis, in a sense, is a struggle with that question, and a struggle whose awkwardness is partly explained by the awkwardness of that question. In its struggle with sociological rubrics, I invoke philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend's argument for an "anarchistic theory of knowledge", outlined in *Against Method* (1975): "Science is an essentially anarchistic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives."

### **The logic of my research project**

The process of fitting a research project geared so far towards understanding where 'constituent power' comes from, onto a primary research project that takes social movement participants and seeks to understand how and why they "got involved", is not without its problems. Moreover, this has so far been a thesis about social movements (understood in a broad sense, to encompass the cultural dimensions of social movements lost to more politically reductionist social-scientific radars, as envisioned by Cox (1999)), from which attention to the main streams of "social movement theory" has been largely absent. As the direction of this thesis now turns, however, to take up the primary research project referred to above – and which stands in such awkward relation to my 'research project' so far – this relation to mainstream social movement theory is not about to change – even if a primary research project revolving around talking to a coterie of social movement participants about why they got involved in social movements seems even more like fodder for such theory than anything in the previous chapters.

Of course, the problematising of mainstream social movement theory, and the innovation of new approaches in this field from radical perspectives, has already been pioneered, not least by Cox (1999) and Purkis (2001), so I feel I can breathe a little easier. But perhaps these mainstream perspectives have not been *so* discredited that I can escape giving some kind of indication as to how I justify their marginality here. I could talk about the psychologism of mainstream social movements theory; I could talk about the untested

assumptions lying at the heart of much social movements theory regarding the instrumental rationality fundamental to the human condition; I could talk about the obsession of some social movements theory with the conviction that we are now living in a fundamentally different sort of social world than any that has gone before; I could talk about the rootedness of so much social movements theory in the field of vision of power – a condition with which sociology has been afflicted since its foundation (Purkis 2004); and so on. And I would hope at this point that the conflict between such perspectives and my anarchist approach to this thesis would be obvious enough. But perhaps, instead of all that, I could take a short-cut here, and simply point out that my goal in this thesis is to explore social movements and counter culture in relation to various anarchist and autonomist ideas of human drives towards freedom, best summed up for me in Graeber's understanding of the concept of counterpower; and I could point out that mainstream social movement theory has just about nothing to say for such a project.

But I have not yet explained how I am going to make that awkward turn between my reflections so far on this subject, and my primary research. First, however, I need to frame my overall research project in terms of my research questions.

### **My research questions**

This thesis takes certain dialogues and debates occurring within left libertarian nodes of the “movement of movements” in the global North as its starting point, and asks: what is the significance of the issues underlying these dialogues and debates for the constitution of oppositional movements? Of course, to attempt to answer this overarching question means asking other questions first. Thus, I start off by asking: what, indeed, *are* the issues underlying these dialogues and debates? I attempt to answer this question in the first chapter. Next, with a working idea of what these issues are, I ask: how can these issues be adopted to the study of how oppositional movements constitute? This, I attempt to answer in the second chapter. And with a working idea, or a hypothesis of sorts, regarding how this might be done – that is, how we might incorporate these issues into



the investigation of oppositional movements and their constitution – I attempt to test this out in analysing my data in the Findings chapter, asking: how and why did my informants get involved in oppositional movements, and what can this tell us about the significance of the issues identified in the previous chapters in the constitution of oppositional movements?

What does this mean in English? I think the progression from chapter one to two is straightforward enough. In chapter one, I take dialogues and debates around concepts such as “activism” within sections of the “movement of movements”, and attempt to make sense of where these discourses have come from, and what issues really lie behind them. Concluding that what these discourses are really about is counter culture, and what I sometimes call 'culturalism', I then ask what is the real significance of these issues to oppositional movements in chapter two. But by the end of chapter two, I am suggesting that these issues are in fact key to understanding the sources of counterpower from which oppositional movements draw their energy. Moving from this hypothesis to analysing the data gleaned from my empirical research is more difficult than the progression between chapters one and two.

### **Fitting the research together**

If one has proposed that we are living in the wake of an “unfinished cultural revolution”, and that contemporary culture is in large part shaped by this protracted explosion of counterpower – as I do at the end of chapter two – it might seem like the ideal thing to do to substantiate this would be to go out and cast the sociological net far and wide to find evidence of this moment's legacies amongst “ordinary people”, and show how at the heart of the multitude lies a latent revolutionary force. However, this being an MA thesis, I decided to try and work out a more manageable and modest research strategy by turning the 'casting-the-net-wide-amongst-ordinary-people' approach on its head; by 'cheating', in a way. Rather than taking “ordinary people” and trying to work out how they might actually be revolutionaries, I opted to 'work backwards', taking participants in anti-

authoritarian and grassroots oppositional movements and trying to work out how they got involved, and what this had to say about counterpower.

Which brings us back to the obvious objections: if I am in search of counterpower, after all, searching for it amongst a collection of teenage anarchists and grassroots 'activists' would at first glance seem, frankly, a bit lame. And beyond talking about 'lameness', this objection might incorporate the observation that the process by which a 'revolutionary' is formed is not necessarily the same as the process by which a revolution is formed.

Without wishing to suggest that the forms and dynamics of radical social movements have stayed the same over the course of what we understand as the "Revolutionary Era", we could generalise enough to observe that right across this timeline, groups of revolutionaries have constituted, deconstituted and reconstituted according to certain rules, while revolutions have constituted according to different ones. And it is surely a mistake to assume that the processes by which revolutionaries (or 'militants', or 'activists' – for present purposes it makes no difference) became revolutionaries were the same ones by which "ordinary people" became revolutionary in revolutionary situations. As the author of "Give Up Activism" (2000) points out, it is not when activist groups have taken on a critical mass of activists that revolution will come.

But as far as movements and critical masses are concerned, it is also the case that when hegemonic crises occur, it is often in connection with the growth of oppositional cultures – or 'counter cultures', if you like – to precisely 'critical mass' proportions – as theorised by Gramsci, and exemplified by much of the social upheaval around '1968' (see Clarke *et al* (1976). And these new forms do not come from nowhere: it is also the case that when such 'counter cultures' reach such trajectories – often a seemingly rapid process – it can be on the back of innovations and developments incubated over much longer periods of time in much smaller subcultural furrows.

To go some way towards illustrating these observations, we might take a number of examples from the youth and student struggles in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, as explored by Lumley. The first major high point of student struggle, in the late sixties, was

characterised by the forging of new identities by movement participants, expressed in no small part in personal appearance. Some of these developments were spearheaded by cultural vanguards of sorts:

The first shock waves to pass through *il Milano perbene* (well-heeled Milan) were generated by Italian 'beatniks'. Their tent-village *New Barbonia* (New Bumsville) on via Ripamonte provoked hysteria at the *Corriere della Serra*, whose headlines on the Milan pages played on the fears of the readers for the safety of their children... The beatniks' long hair, in particular, was used to conjure up images of dirt, primitivism, and sexual depravity.

The beatniks were part of a bohemian world which, in Milan, found its centre of gravity and its headquarters in the Bar Giamaica. For them, lifestyle and politics were at one with their anti-bourgeois, anti-institutional ideas. However, their brand of shock tactics was an extreme form of a more generalized use of clothing and appearance for expressive purposes... The rapidity of the changes in appearance can be seen by looking at photographs taken in 1967 and in 1968. Photographs of the Architecture Faculty occupation in Milan in early 1967 show clean-shaven male students dressed in jackets and ties. Their dress is of somber hue – browns and dark greens – and little that is sartorial distinguishes them from the rest of the city's middle class. Pictures taken a year later show a very different image of the student. This time the Cuban-style beard is in fashion, many men and women students are wearing *blu-jeans* (as they are known in Italian), men are not wearing jackets, unless they have a military look with cap to match. Some have red handkerchiefs tied around their necks, but the tie has been dispensed with. The colours are brighter. A similar comparison can be made with the class photographs of a city *liceo*; that of 1967 is formal and everyone has a neat appearance, whilst in the 1968 picture the young students look scruffy and wave their clenched fists at the camera (Lumley 1990:296-297).

To many of its participants, the next great upsurge of youth struggle in Italy, just about a decade later, represented a clean break from the heritage of 1968. But again, it did not come from nowhere: the ingredients of the radical social force that by 1977 had become a mass movement – the “Movement of '77” – had been nurtured for some years before their flourishing, in no small part by groups of counter cultural agitators who had themselves cut their teeth on the student struggles of the late sixties, and committed

themselves to the “recuperation of the themes of anti-authoritarian revolt originating in '68”, and to their popularisation:<sup>71</sup>

Youth politics developed in the 1970s out of a counter-cultural environment similar to that in which feminism took root, but it was primarily male. It was the libertarian and counter-cultural currents coming out of 1968 which incubated many of the ideas, and experimented in the lifestyles that anticipated developments in the mid seventies.

In Milan, the forerunners were associated with two influential reviews, which developed a national readership – *Erba Voglio* and *Re Nudo*, which were both set up in 1970... Both reviews opened themselves to the debates of the early feminist and gay movements. But *Re Nudo* was more important for the formation of a specifically youth politics...

The student experiences of '68 were always principally of a university-based movement, and were often a closed book to the next generation. Although the exponents of *Re Nudo* belonged to the '68 generation, they realized this could be a limitation when it came to communicating to a younger generation, and were therefore better at it than those who were unaware of the problem (Lumley 1990:297-298).

It might, of course, be argued that there is something problematic about the generalising of counter cultural forms from such 'vanguards'; something, well, 'vanguardist'. My short answer to this is that if such 'vanguardism' has a hand in producing such autonomous, mass and anarchic movements as that “of 1977”, then it's a pretty good kind of 'vanguardism' – or more generously, agency and initiative.

But still, for many radicals – and particularly anarchists – a feeling might linger that there is something not right about this; that when revolutionary cultures blossom, it is meant to be “spontaneous” (a sentiment usually sitting in some kind of very confused and fudged relation to the ostensible purpose of revolutionary activism itself). Again, though, spontaneity starts somewhere. Indeed, when we look away from the set-piece battles of the 'Revolutionary Era', and inspect that part of the anthropological record devoted to “ethnogenesis” – to how cultures emerge – we find that many of what we

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71 As explicitly spelled out at the first national conference of the *Re Nudo* collective (Lumley 1990:297).

think of as peoples or cultures appear to have emerged not 'spontaneously', arbitrarily or randomly, but as conscious, collective, even political projects – social movements, if you will. This truism, of course, applies to societies based around particular visions of authority, religious power, and governance, as much as anything else; but more interestingly for our purposes, where we find fiercely egalitarian and even anarchist cultures in the “primitive” world, the forms that these cultures take appear to derive from agency and collective action – from the cut and thrust of revolution and exodus. Culture, then, is political. It does not spontaneously congeal together of its own accord, but is made.

Perhaps, then, in trying to grasp how hegemonic crises and revolutions – the 'uptimes' of struggle – occur, it might not be a total waste of time to look at how individuals become attracted to revolutionary social movements in 'downtimes' of struggle. And, following my argument towards the end of the last chapter that counter culture and youth cultures can be looked at as zones of counterpower, it might be even more 'not a waste of time' to look at this in relation to counter cultural and youth cultural currents with which social movements find themselves in dialogue. But if this is logically tenable, a practical problem is not hard to see on the horizon: that is, what kind of insight are we going to get from talking to a bunch of activists? How do we extricate personal insight from 'party lines', and from 'political' ways of talking about things forged over years of debate and political dialogue? Cox (1999) tried to get around a similar problem – in his case, that of figuring out what is really going on in social movement milieux, rather than filtering through people's *agendas* about what is going on – by studying what he called the “ordinary participants” of social movements, as opposed to the 'organisers' and organic intellectuals – the 'politicians' of anti-politics – who have been more often studied.

For me, this is where the 'youth' part comes in. I have adopted a somewhat similar research strategy to Cox – but, in line with my particular research concern: why and how people get involved in social movements in the first place – I design mine differently: I study people for whom the 'hows' and 'whys' of getting involved in politics are recent

questions, rather than questions obscured by years of politicking. This means young people.

## The informants

What makes a young radical? I interviewed seven young people, all between the ages of 16 and 20 (two sixteen year olds, one seventeen year old, two eighteen year olds, and two twenty year olds); for six of these informants, involvement in grassroots and anti-authoritarian politics had been via the short-lived collective Anarchist Youth.<sup>72</sup> For my seventh informant, involvement had been through much less explicitly 'political', and not specifically anarchist, activities, such as "grassroots" campus activism at university, and the "Shell To Sea" campaign, revolving around community struggles against controversial plans to build a gas pipeline and refinery on the Erris peninsula in County Mayo.

Of the 'Anarchist Youth cohort' – my first six interviewees: Petey (16), Diarmuid (18), Malcolm (20), William (17), Stefan (16) and Caoimhe (18) – all would know each other, and in some cases appear to have formed strong friendships and links of sociality through their mutual involvement in Anarchist Youth. For most of them, however, these links of acquaintance do not predate involvement in AY, other than on a very slight level<sup>73</sup> – with

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72 Anarchist Youth was founded in December 2005, and for a time represented a dynamic and visible fixture on the landscape of libertarian politics in Ireland (being based in the greater Dublin area). But the dynamism was short-lived: by late 2006, with involvement dropping off for various reasons, the small ensemble of remaining committed members had come to the conclusion that Anarchist Youth as an autonomous entity could not be sustained. Rather than simply dissolving the group, these individuals opted to frame Anarchist Youth's fate as a merger of the remaining members with the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM), Ireland's largest and most established anarchist political organization. By the time of my last interview with a (by now former) Anarchist Youth member, one of the remaining members (also one of my informants) had already joined WSM, while two (that informant and another) were in the process of doing so. Three other AY members had already been members of WSM since before AY's dissolution.

73 This requires qualification: Petey, one of the main instigators behind AY's formation, put considerable energy into 'canvassing' support for building links between young radicals prior to AY's formation, travelling to meetings of the Basta collective in Wicklow and so on, and building up a considerable cache of acquaintances. Likewise, Malcolm and Diarmuid would have known people "to see", from protests and gigs – including Basta gigs. Stefan and William would have known each other through the Basta collective, in which they were both involved prior to AY.

the exception of Caoimhe and Diarmuid, a couple. However, while all would know who each other are<sup>74</sup>, it is certainly not the case that all would know each other well, nor is it the case that all would be connected by strong bonds of friendship. Indeed, AY could be seen as having been composed of a number of intersecting circles of people, and along these lines we can see a number of different 'types' of routes by which people found their way to AY. My seventh interviewee, Josie (20), however, would not know any of the AY cohort, to see or otherwise, and has had no involvement with AY. The only 'objective' connection between Josie and the AY cohort, then, is broadly, and through an orientation to the grassroots and anti-authoritarian wing of the social movements landscape in Ireland – as well, of course, as the experience of being a newcomer and a young person in that context.

The gender imbalance in my sample of informants is reflective of the gender imbalance of the social movements I am concerned with. But this is not the place for a discussion on this. Two other interviews with female members of AY were mooted, but these both fell through for various reasons.

### **Why and how did I pick these informants?**

It might seem unusual that six of my informants were drawn from a single organisation, which the seventh had no affiliation to. I will explain how this situation came about. In consultation with my supervisor at the start of my research project, I had whittled my large sketch of possible informants – drawn from various youth milieux around the country who I vaguely associated with grassroots and oppositional social movements – down to a much neater research target of the collective Anarchist Youth. The logic for this could be summed up as: if you are looking for young people to research, who are involved in grassroots, anti-authoritarian, oppositional social movements, you might as well go to the one group in the country that explicitly fits that bill: Anarchist Youth.

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<sup>74</sup> To some greater degree, that is, than the 'slight' acquaintances predating AY. It would be hard not to, of course, having had the organizational experience of sitting in the same room as one another in numerous meetings.

Once this decision had been made, tracking down willing informants from AY was relatively easy. I have been involved in libertarian and anarchist social movement activities in Ireland since my late teens, and have been living in the environs of Dublin for about a year and a half, bringing me closer to the Dublin nodes of these movements – also the stomping grounds of AY. I knew personally a handful of people at the 'older end' of the AY membership, and through them I got telephone numbers for other members. I favoured interviewing people who were younger, people who I did not know personally, and people other than those I judged to have been 'on the scene' for a while (the latter for reasons outlined). I made some phone calls and quickly and easily found some willing respondents. In the process of carrying out my first interviews, I collected more phone numbers for more potential interviewees, and despite some of the people I contacted being unavailable or unwilling to meet, within two weeks of starting this part of the research (late August 2006), I had completed five interviews. To use the pseudonyms I have given the informants (I decided early on to make the interviews anonymous), first was Petey, then Diarmuid, then William, then Malcolm, and then Stefan. I did not know any of these informants, apart from having been vaguely introduced to Malcolm through a mutual friend once, and having been in the vicinity of both Petey and Diarmuid on a handful of occasions at meetings and protests. I had vaguely exchanged words once with Diarmuid, at the anti-G8 camp in Stirling, Scotland in July 2005, where he asked me if he could borrow some of my newspapers (covering the protests) when I was finished with them. (I said yes, and then never bothered to give them to him, fearing the hassle of getting them back. I felt a bit bad about this, and always wondered if he held it against me. I think he didn't, because as was the case with most of the interviews, the one with Diarmuid moved along in a lively, friendly sort of way.)

I feel that, as an interviewer, I was quite privileged in this research experience, in that my informants saw me as a peer of sorts; I had introduced myself to them not just as a researcher, but as someone doing research who was involved in many of the same activities and networks as they were; and, as indicated above, some would have vaguely recognised me from these contexts.



My sixth interview, with Caoimhe, was carried out much later, in January 2007. This was an interview I had intended to carry out around the same time as the first five, but the original arrangements had fallen through, and I had dithered on re-arranging an interview, thinking that perhaps I could 'get away' with just having done five interviews. After a chat with my supervisor, I thought better of this.

My seventh interview, with Josie, was carried out in a somewhat last minute fashion, in March 2007. As I was approaching the Findings section of my thesis, I was becoming increasingly disturbed by the feeling that my thesis – or at least, this part of my thesis – was going to look like “A Sociology of Anarchist Youth”, which it was very much not conceived as. Thus, I decided to try and interview an informant who paralleled my other informants somewhat in terms of age, and involvement in grassroots, anti-authoritarian oppositional movements, but who otherwise had no connection to the AY informants. I am happy that I did this, because I think it added a certain richness to my data analysis and findings that otherwise would have been absent. Josie's interview was also exceptional in that I knew her quite well prior to our interview, both from campus 'activism' in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (where we had both been both enrolled), and from social movement activities further afield, as well as through links of friendship.

All of the interviews were of a semi-structured nature, as I felt that launching into them with a questionnaire set in stone would be of little use in eliciting the kind of data I was looking for. After all, I was primarily concerned with themes which I would not assume would be obvious to most people most of the time. And while it is not quite the same thing, I am thinking of Graeber's (2004:12) point that an “obvious role for a radical intellectual” is to “look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are doing, and then offer those ideas back”. I do not think that such figuring out of “larger implications” of my informants' routes to grassroots, anti-authoritarian politics vis-a-vis counterpower and the oppositional DNA strands of popular culture could be elicited by questionnaire-type questions. Actually, I think that much of the data used in my Findings chapter was

elicited not by initial questions, but by follow-up questions, where I attempted to tease data out of my informants, referring back to other questions and other responses, and so on. If I had stuck to a strict script and not done this, neither do I think that my informants would have felt relaxed enough or comfortable enough to converse with me as freely as they did.

### **Ethical considerations**

Despite the relaxed and candid nature of the interviews, I felt myself in an awkward position when analysing the interview data. Sometimes people interview complete strangers, and sometimes people (especially 'engaged' researchers) interview people close to them; I was in the curious (or what felt like curious) situation of having an enormous amount of privilege regarding the personal information of (mostly) a collection of people who I did not know, but who in some sense would be peers; I fully expected to find myself bumping into many of my informants again, frequently enough, through movement activities. And now we have a strange link. On the one hand, this fact has put me under pressure to take quite seriously the kind of considerations discussed by Purkis (2001) regarding the responsibility of researchers to the people they research. For instance, at times I have felt like including some piece of interview data in my Findings chapter that was illustrative of something or other, and have had to agonise over it, simply because it would reflect on my informant in an unkind way. And since I stressed to all of my informants that I would be happy to pass my research on to them, and even to make it available within "the movement" (if it turned out to be any good), I feel like I would be betraying the trust they put in me to do this in a responsible way if I ended up offending anyone. This is a tricky situation, as research is pointless if one cannot say anything for fear of offending someone – or rather, someone with whom they are supposed to keep up some kind of cordial relationship. I suspect there are no easy answers here. Luckily, this never amounted to a serious problem for me – that is, it never affected the writing of my thesis in a substantive way, so I suppose I have more time to figure out this quandary.

In another way – again, thanks to my unusual privilege as a peer of sorts – my bid at doing 'responsible' research, or research that can be fed back into the world of those who are being researched, is a model for how this might be expected to work: I have bumped into some of my informants on a number of occasions since interviewing them, and these have all been extremely friendly experiences; and definitely not 'weird'! The relationship between my informants and I is now nothing other than that of people who had been vague peers, but now know each other better, thanks to a collaborative research exercise. Distance between researcher and researched, in this context, does not exist. But again, this is thanks to my unusual privilege in this situation.

## Chapter four: The (counter)power of culture

### **Introduction**

Here, I present and analyse data drawn from the interviews with my seven informants, asking how and why did my informants get involved in radical anti-authoritarian social movements, and how do the answers to these questions reflect on the issues raised in the previous chapters? In particular, what does the data have to say about the 'hypothesis' of sorts that I arrived at towards the end of chapter three? That is, that the processes by which oppositional social movements constitute draw deeply on the legacies of the 'unfinished cultural revolution' seen unfolding over a large stretch of the twentieth century and beyond.

The structure of this chapter reflects my struggle to balance the needs to, on the one hand, provide a well-rounded account of how my informants gravitated towards the movements that they did, in a relatively 'data-led' manner – what is effectively one dimension of my research concern, and perhaps the more straightforward one – and on the other hand, to satisfy the more specific concerns connected to the above 'hypothesis'. Thus, the structure of the chapter may appear a little lopsided. It starts off by setting the scene, as it were, vis-a-vis the routes by which my informants came to radicalization and social movement participation; in this vein are sections considering how much these represented *individual* processes (see section 'On your own'), and how much they were shaped by the influence of personal contacts (see 'Mentors'). But the points where this narrative runs into the issues I am particularly interested in, and which relate closely to my 'hypothesis' (see section 'Collective effervescence'), are the cues for lengthier theoretical excursions, linking back into direct data analysis intermittently, but not consistently anchored around the interview data in the same way that the earlier sections were. These sections also go beyond 'pure' data analysis, in that I use them to consider what the lessons might be, on the vista of my analysis and findings, for the kinds of social movements that this thesis is about. Thus, my 'conclusions' blur into my 'findings', rather than being arbitrarily sectioned off into a separate chapter.

On a methodological note, I should point out that the format of the more 'data-led' sections is very much bound up with the semi-structured nature of my interviews. As the questions that I asked were not exactly the same in any two interviews, I cannot simply take questions that were standard across all interviews, and lay out the seven answers to each question. In other words, this section is *data-led*, rather than *question-led*.

In addition, the different 'data-led' sections overlap and intersect to some degree: again, partly because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, some 'chunks' of data elicited from the informants simultaneously straddled more than one of the themes under which I have organised the data. The overlaps and intersections will be considered in the analysis accompanying the data.

### **On your own**

Here, I consider the experiences related by my informants that could be considered reflective of the 'individual' parts of the processes by which they moved towards involvement in oppositional social movements – the things that informants thought or did on their own, before (or 'outside') large-scale contact with social networks connected with such movements, and (more or less) autonomously from people who directly influenced them in the direction of the movements. This is divided into three sections.

The first section, 'Anarchists inside?', is concerned with the rationalities that formed the basis for informants' attraction to the philosophies implicated in radical anti-authoritarian social movements.

The second, 'Implantation', presents data in which informants, still on an individual level, can be seen as having become captivated by the spectacle of radical social movement action, in several cases that of protest, and in several cases mediated.

And the third, 'The quest', presents data in which some of the informants relate the very isolated natures of their search for a 'home' in radical social movement politics.

### **Anarchists inside?**

When discussing the issue of why anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics appealed to them, almost all of the informants cite outlooks they developed long before any conscious engagement with theory. Three of the AY cohort – Petey, Diarmuid and Stefan – refer to strongly anti-authoritarian outlooks they held long before any conscious politicization:

[...] from an early age, I saw that... I absolutely hated going to school everyday, boring school, I eh... being chased around by the police in my area, I always had this, you know, from what I see now of an anarchist-type view on the world, I never had any time for politicians or party politics [...] (Petey)

I suppose, I suppose to a certain extent I... from what I experienced, em, in school, cos I had a *very* bad time in primary school and even secondary school, ehh, with the authorities within the school, like the principal and the teachers, I was very, like, I had to leave my primary school and go to a different school, and I was in danger of getting thrown out of my secondary school a good few times, but that was when I was getting political, but this was beforehand even, I always seemed to have a problem with, eh, with being told what to do and maybe, probably, that must have affected the way my politics would lean later on, so... (Diarmuid)

[...] I always believed in freedom, I always believed that, eh, people, eh.. I never let any rules kind of get on top of me, even when I first started going to primary school and things, it was always kind of, everything I did was purely... more out of

conscience than because somebody told me “do it because I tell you to do it”. So, em... mind you, I got in a fair bit of trouble back then, but you know. So, em, I was always kind of, socially, a little anarchist without ever realizing it. (Stefan)

Stefan tells a story similarly positing ostensibly anarchist sensibilities prior to politicization in relation to Sandra, another (now former) AY member, and relates this to his own experience. (I was meant to interview Sandra also – this, unfortunately, fell through for logistical reasons.) Stefan's account refers to a radio interview several AY members were involved in (on the day of the 'Love Ulster' riots of March 2006, incidentally):

[...] I remember, Sandra was, em, just before we did the interview on the radio, was, kind of... we did kind of a mock run through a few questions, in, ahm, in that little room we have in Trinity, and... she said something that was kinda similar to my background as well, she said, em, she never really *became* an anarchist, she was always kind of an anarchist but never really was aware of it. Eh, she told something, she told, a... nice story, her dad was, ah, her dad, like, killed a goldfish or something like that, and... or, maybe it wasn't a goldfish 'cause very few people would actually willingly kill pets. But, em, he was killing a fish or something like that, and she just started, like, “hey, wait, that's a life, that's not cool, that's not right”, and ah... it's kind of similar to me as well, like now... I don't know, I've been a vegetarian since I was seven or eight years old, and, em, for a huge variety of reasons, but, eh... I guess, always had... I had, I had a well enough set up background that I was able to just kind of be able to plunge into anarchism, that it wasn't, it didn't involve, like, much of a transformation, you know [...] (Stefan)

In response to my question about the “rationale” for her involvement in what she refers to as the “grassroots movement”, Josie cites long and deeply-held “moral principles”, which she considers integral to her identity – albeit some of which moral principles she traces to the influence of parents (who she describes elsewhere as “not political”; see sub-section, 'Family Matters', below):

[...] I would have been aware, for, like, a good few years of stuff that, like, I would conceive as being morally wrong, of, like, stuff like wars and, you know, just, to give

an example, so, that would have influenced me, and... it's basically... moral principles that would make me... I mean, just my set of morals that I have for myself, that, you know, I would just like to see everyone else be able to achieve, and not everyone else is able to achieve it... and I'm not saying that everyone else should live up to my standards or whatever, but just that, the basic human needs, that people should have them, em... I reckon that would be my main reason for going for it. And, just, the more you get involved, like, the more you find out and the more you get spurred on to do more and more things, so... yeah [...]

[...]

DD: [...] those moral principles you're talking about, would you think of them... [as] things you sort of absorbed or took on board, or would you say you kind of always had a, you know, a core, or a base, of that, you know, that was sort of always there, was it always there, or did it develop at a certain point?

Josie: As far as I can remember it's always been there. Yeah. Em... like, you know, I think nearly every day my morals are either added to or taken away from or adjusted somehow and I think that, just, as far as I can remember, like, I've just always been... messin' about with them and just... yeah.

[...] Well, also, you know... my parents, especially my mam, you know, she would, you know, she's taught me, well, you know, I'm a bit biased, but she's taught me the right way to perceive people, and, she would have been... she would have been a big influence on my morals 'cause she is just, you know... our family have been through a *lot* and... but she's always stayed strong and, you know, just shows that even when shitty things are happening and... around the world, whether it's in your house, around the world, you know, you need to stay strong and... keep your morals and just stick by them and, so, definitely my mam had a major – she wouldn't have said, “this is right, this is wrong”, but just, I don't know, I think the way she structured them or – just – I dunno, something about the way she goes about things that would have just, maybe... it would have influenced me and shown me a way to deal with things which, you know, I took some bits on board...

DD: Ok.

Josie: ... and then the rest is just a hybrid of stuff and I don't know whether it was in me beforehand I wouldn't be able to tell...

Caoimhe mentions childhood inquisitiveness and transgressiveness:



Caoimhe: [...] I remember actually when I was much younger [...] I used to imagine what the world would be like without money, and how would you survive without money, and I was thinkin', "you know, if you got rid of some things it'd be fairly simple 'cause you'd just need to trade, and you'd trade one thing for another", and, you know [...]

[...]

DD: [...] Could you, just, I'm just wondering could you say a tiny bit more about that part of your personality, let's say, that kind of clicked with the anarchist idea, you know? Like, and you're, say, I know you were a bit reluctant earlier about using the word "rebel" or "rebellion" or whatever, but...

Caoimhe: Yeah – it does kind of come down to that in a way, there are people out there who kind of see the world around them and think "I don't want to be like this, you know, I don't want to be like my parents, I don't want to be like this group in school, I don't want to be like all my friends, I don't want to be the same, I want to be different, I wanna get out there, what do I wanna do", and... you kind of survey the world around you and you question why it is what it is, and it comes from your personality, like, you know, growing up and being a very inquisitive child and instead of, say, growing up and playing with my dolls I used to read a lot of books and just, reading and building up your imagination and just kinda, like, young kids, say, who, you can take one kid who watches TV all the time and then another kid who reads books and stuff, the kid who reads books and stuff develops an imagination and can imagine different things and then begins to question this and begins to question that, and, "why is that this way?", and that kinda can bring about... you know, you have these doubts in your head, as you get a bit older and you start thinking about the bigger picture [...]

## **Implantation**

In discussing the origins of their attraction to anarchism, the responses of two of the AY cohort betray the significance of the mediated spectacle of protest, before any process of conscious politicization had begun, and before any links had been made to like-minded people. The examples that Petey and Diarmuid cite come from the period 2000-2001, when the emerging movement of movements – or "anti-globalisation movement", as it was often dubbed at the time – was very dramatically breaking into visibility in many

parts of the world, in particular stealing media spotlights via high profile protests against the summits of the institutions of global capitalist governance, from the Group of Eight Nations (G8) to international financial institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Bank and World Economic Forum (WEF). Petey's example may be drawn from the mobilisation that shut down the 2000 World Bank summit in Prague.

Ehhhh... personally how I came to anarchism? It was in 2000, when I was ten years old, I, eh, saw members of the black bloc smashing up a bank on TV and I asked my father who they were and he told me briefly that they were anarchists and, eh, I was very interested in why these people were smashing up a – a McDonalds, who I loved at the time and I would eat regularly... I read up on it, and since then I've been vaguely active in anarchist circles... more so in the last year with the starting up of Anarchist Youth (Petey).

Diarmuid: [...] I always had an interest in history and stuff. History, social history, social revolution. Stuff like that, and I always found it very interesting. And, eh, I don't know, it sort of spawned from that, I think I, I have a memory of watching... images of Genoa in... 2000 was it, or 1999? I can't remember now...

DD: 2001.

Diarmuid: 2001, I remember watching that, yeah, and eh... just being very intrigued by what these people were doing out in the streets and, like, fighting police for... no reason it seemed to me at the time, and just it sorta... snowballed from then on, I became more interested, I would... basically, for around three years I was very interested in libertarian, anarchist politics, but eh... I would never participate, I was always unsure of myself.

It is not so clear from the data whether Malcolm's exposure to such spectacles (in his case both mediated and unmediated) precedes, coincides with or comes after contacts with anarchistic social circles, but in any case such exposure seems to have been influential (alongside influences within his family home – as discussed further below). Again, Malcolm makes reference to one of the major summit protest mobilisations of the turn of the 1990s and 2000s – in this case, the protests against the WTO summit in Seattle in November 1999, often seen as the start of the 'big-summit-protests' phase of

the movement of movements; what I referred to earlier as the 'days of action' period. Malcolm also refers to 'Reclaim the Streets', something of an institution within those sections of the movement of movements of the global North continuous with the “DIY” and “direct action” movements of the 1990s. Reclaim the Streets (RTS) is a practice whereby free, unauthorised street parties are held on sections of urban streetscape “liberated” temporarily from motorised traffic. In Ireland, “RTSs” have run up against occasionally brutal police repression (see Moffat 2004).

DD: [...] How'd you get interested in anarchism in the first place, what brought you to anarchism? Obviously, you mentioned a couple of things [...] But what was the first thing, how did it happen?

Malcolm: I guess, eh... just, eh, having friends from the punk scene and, eh... just seeing these things around me, and, eh, seeing Reclaim The Streets when I was a kid, and stuff like that, and... I guess especially like eh... seeing stuff like Seattle on the news when I was a kid and stuff, and wondering why this was happening, and, you know, why people would go and do these things, and I guess, eh, just having literature around my house that was there for me to read as well.<sup>75</sup>

And while the other informants do not attribute such importance to experiences of this nature, perhaps the impact on Josie of seeing examples of the “grassroots movement” in action are not entirely dissimilar – even if (as indicated above in the 'Anarchists inside?' section, and below in 'Family matters') such experiences did not represent her first exposure to the ideas and practices that would inform her later involvement in grassroots politics (although they may have helped her to 'put a name' to this sphere). Like Malcolm, Josie refers to an 'institution' of the 1990s-vintage “DIY” or “direct action” currents implicated in the movement of movements – that of “Food Not Bombs” (FNB), a practice whereby 'activists' set up free food stalls on the street, often using surplus food acquired for free from supermarkets and so on, which otherwise would have been dumped.

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<sup>75</sup> For further discussion of Malcolm's “literature around my house”, see sub-section “Family Matters”, below.

DD: Could I ask you... em... like, you've got a certain idea about what the "grassroots movement", to call it that, what it... what it represents to you [...] Can you remember early examples of, em... can you remember any early examples, or the first examples of times where, em... where you saw something that you had come to understand as the grassroots movement, y' know, can you remember the first things that you saw that were like, em, "Ok, what's this?", you know?

Josie: Em... Yeah, yeah. Not [that], I would have recognized this... eh, hang on. I was walking down... Parnell Street, or somewhere? Back of the Ilac?

[...]

Yeah, it is Parnell Street, isn't it? [...] And, em, Food Not Bombs were set up, and they were handing out food, and they had a drum kit, out, and I was just walking by and I was like, "Huh? What's that? What's goin' on there?" And just went over, and like, I didn't know anyone, and I don't – as far as I remember, I didn't even talk to anyone, but I was just kind of like, picking up a leaflet, and I was like: This is kind of cool; drum kit on the road, free food, great, you know, and I guess, that would be the point where I would've been like "Hey", you know, "I've never seen this being done before, this is new, it seems "alternative"", and I suppose it would've been at that point that I woulda said, "Well, you know..." I wouldn't have known it as grassroots then, but, it was.

And while for all of the informants, personal contacts – whether with family, friends, or otherwise – played a significant part in determining their routes toward radical social movement politics (see below), for some, this road was nonetheless characterised by a very individual determination to 'find' their political niche.

### **The quest**

Here, Petey relates the individual dimension of his gravitation towards anarchism:

DD: And... from the time that you were ten or eleven, [...] getting interested in anarchism, politics, for want of a better word, you know, from the first thing that you saw on TV and the first scraps of things you heard from people and read about... [...]

from that point when you were ten or eleven, to the point where you were actually involved in setting up an anarchist collective or an anarchist group when you were – 15/16?

Petey: 15, yeah...

DD: 15... eh... could you say a bit about that route, was that a very individual route you took, was that a route where, there were kind of other people around you who were on a similar buzz, or...?

Petey: Eh, it was a very hard route, and very much an individual route, I went on my first demonstration when, it was May of 2000, I actually went with my mother, it was down in town... then subsequently I'd be going on other demonstrations, always either on my own or with a parent or a friend...

DD: What kind of demonstrations were these?

Petey: Ehm, anti-war demonstrations, the kind of big ones around February 2003, Palestinian ones, anti-racism ones, always, like, never part of a group, always on my own, and I always resented that, because I saw different groups, and at the time I was, sort of... I wouldn't say flirting, but I was getting some Socialist Worker papers, so they were trying to draw me in in that kind of a way, but I wanted... not to belong, but to be with people who also shared my views, but... they seemed to all be much older than me and knew very very much... I was only getting into anarchism and hadn't read much on it so I was very... personally very afraid to go into a room of twenty or so forty-year old anarchists who, you know, know the ins and outs so... another reason I set up Anarchist Youth so people wouldn't have that shyness going into that kind of situation, but em, when I came to... when I started going to protests on my own I was probably about 12 or 13, a communist friend of mine, we set up a very ill-fated and short group called Today, which was –

DD: "Today"?

Petey: Yeah, Today, which was meant to be an organisation of Dublin's activist youth... we had absolutely no politics, and we, eh, had one meeting which no-one turned up, but eh, since then, eh, an anarchist actually came to that meeting who told me about what was going on, and he was... he was in his late teens so, thanks to setting up this disappointing and ill-fated group I have made the first links with other anarchists, so [inaudible].

Diarmuid tells a similar story:

DD: Ok. And... when you did do things like... well, you said that when you used to go on the anti-war marches,<sup>76</sup> when they were big, em, you'd be going with people who you knew, and mates and stuff like that, 'cause, I guess, loads of people were going, but... And you said that, around the time of Mayday 2004,<sup>77</sup> like, you would've kind of realised there was a couple of people in your school and stuff who were interested in it as well, but, em, when you were kind of initially making your decisions to go to Mayday 2004 and to put up posters... or, as well, when you were making your decision to go to a Dissent meeting,<sup>78</sup> would you have been doing that pretty much... Would you have been doing that on sort of... on an individual level, would you have been making those decisions on your own or would you've been kind of – would you've been chatting about it with mates, and gone along with mates?

Diarmuid: Ehh... no, it was actually very much on my own, there was only that one other guy, he... probably went to one meeting with me, then I... had to go on my own, which was, eh... a bit intimidating, but eh, it was very much on an individual level that I decided to participate at all or to go to meetings or to a protest or anything, just because... I always felt, obviously, it's a personal choice, it's eh... something you do. And my friends who I said I discuss politics [with], is basically me defending anarchism against whatever they were arguing for, Stalinism or some shite.

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76 Part of the anti-war movement revolving around the Iraq War, and reaching its highpoint in 2003.

77 "Mayday 2004" constituted a pivotal moment for the Irish wing of the movement of movements, and for the development of libertarian social movement politics in Ireland in connection with this. This "Mayday" actually involved a weekend of events revolving around the EU summit being held in Dublin to mark the accession of the new EU states, in connection with the Nice Treaty. This represented the Irish movement's "own" summit protest. In the event, the state unleashed its riot police and its (borrowed) water cannons, and the Irish movement was catapulted into a significant degree of public attention. In the wake of all this, the movement grew. See Cox (2006) for an account of some of this written (if not published) soon after the events.

78 Here, "Dissent" stands in for what was officially known as "Dissent! *Éire*", the Irish affiliate to Dissent!, the UK-based network organising the mobilisation against the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles, Scotland. A few words to put this in context: Essentially Dissent! *Éire* existed to organise Irish libertarians and anarchists travelling to Scotland for the summit, but for a time it became a centre of gravity of sorts, in its own right, within the Irish movement. After the G8 events, it merged with "Dublin Grassroots Network" (DGN), the entity through which "Mayday 2004" (see above) was organised, to form "Grassroots Dissent" (GD). Since this time, this has been – in theory – the only thing coming close to a 'central' organising hub for the movement in Ireland (along with the increasingly infrequent "Anti-Authoritarian Assemblies" GD has hosted) – and even this status would be geographically narrow, GD being essentially a Dublin affair. In any case, in reality GD has been a nebulous entity, having more symbolic importance than any meaningful organisational role, with movement activities being organised 'around' it rather than 'through' it. Of course, if one were inclined, this could all be related to the idea of organisations as "disorganisations" thrown around in similar contexts (see e.g. McKay 1996); alas, here I am not so inclined.

We might note here that although Petey and Diarmuid are the two informants who most emphasise the isolatedness of their trajectories towards grassroots politics, even from their accounts it is clear that personal contacts played some role in this process. It is this dimension of the informants' experiences to which I will now turn.

## Mentors

### Family matters

While both Petey and Diarmuid identify the isolatedness of what I have called their 'quests' toward political homes, they nonetheless see their parents as having had significant roles in setting them off on those trajectories. Interestingly, both sets of parents are, in occupational terms, of the social layer of "traditional intellectuals", (Gramsci 1971) and of that of the 'cultural mass' (Harvey 1993) – Petey's parents working in the news media, and Diarmuid's parents being third level lecturers. Their parents' sometimes left-liberal orientations left their marks on both informants:

Petey: They [my parents] would both have been involved for a very long time in journalism and media, television, also being quite liberal; my mother would have been a communist in her college days, so I think I always would have had that vague lefty, vague media type view of the world from the very beginning, which I like, you know, and I'm glad of it, to be honest, 'cause it's given me some of my ideas and some of my views.

DD: And so what do they think of your politics?

Petey: Ehh... They've been very supportive, very supportive. From going on demonstrations with them when I was younger to small things like lifts to meetings, they've been very supportive. They haven't been *totally* supportive of every little thing, they don't want to see me getting arrested or locked up, primarily they want to see me happy and wanna see me safe. Or, my mom's big thing was not being allowed go to the states and stuff. But they've grown to accept it, and they'll support me. [...]

DD: And you make no bones about telling them, “Well, yeah, I’m an anarchist, I believe in da da da da da da...”?”

Petey: No, they wouldn’t – I’d say they probably held the same views when they were my age, you know, I mean, or with their friends.

DD: Right, I already asked you how you got involved in Anarchist Youth. I wanted to ask you as well, how you, even before that, how you were attracted to the idea of anarchism, or how you came to the idea of anarchism, or anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist politics...

Diarmuid: Em... Well, I always think about this myself, and I always think my parents had a lot to play in it, even though their politics would not be described as anarchist at all. My dad is from the north, he grew up in Belfast, and he’s always been into, sort of, fad politics – whatever’s in fashion, he’ll be into.

[...]

He was always sort of against Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, he always had a problem with them, and I remember when I was much younger, maybe ten, I remember him talking about them, and sort of absorbing stuff he was saying, and thinking about it much later on when I was fifteen, sixteen. [...] My mom is just sort of normal, left politics, liberal, very liberal – crap, really, and they’ve always – in my eyes anyway, they always seemed to have a distrust of party politics, and the main parties like Fianna Fail, Fine Gael; and I picked up on that [...]

[...]

DD: You said earlier on that [...] your parents weren’t too mad about the idea of you going to Scotland for the G8;<sup>79</sup> how, in general, have your parents and your family taken your involvement in politics and stuff, more generally?

Diarmuid: Generally, they’ve always viewed it as a positive thing. A number of the actions I’ve been on, they wouldn’t have agreed with at all.

DD: Like?

Diarmuid: Stirling [G8 Scotland 2005], Mayday 2004, stuff like that. At the moment, they don’t have a huge problem with it, she’s quite supportive of me being involved in politics, in any kind of politics, in anarchism. My Dad, not so much. I don’t really talk about it that much with my dad, but with my mom, I do quite a bit. [...] When they found out I wanted to go to Scotland [to protest the 2005 G8 summit], my Mom took

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79 As part of the mobilisation against the 2005 G8 summit, that is – an event inhabiting the tradition sparked off by the big summit protests of the turn of the 1990s and 2000s. See 'Implantation' section, above, and footnote to section 'The quest', above.



away my passport so I couldn't travel, so I had to go find it again. And then when I found it, my dad had stopped talking to me, for around three months.

[...]

I think it was just something completely new, completely different for them. My mom was [...] in Germany at the time of the 1968 student revolution, and she met, she was in a commune, like... she was in a sit-in, there was a sit-in for like a couple of weeks, and she was there for three or four days, just meeting loads of people [...] And she knows all about stuff like the Baader-Meinhof, stuff like that at the time, and I think she equated stuff like that, like Baader-Meinhof stuff [laughs] with what was happening in Scotland, so she was very worried about me; I was quite young, only 16, and a bit naïve, to be honest. And yeah, so there was a lot of opposition, but I struggled through that, and we're all right now. They don't have a problem with it now at all, 'cause we talk about it a lot, about theory and the lot.

DD: And I know you touched on this earlier, but could you say a tiny bit more about how much of an *influence* your ma had on you, politically?

[...]

Diarmuid: Em... See, it's hard to say, 'cause my dad is a much more easy person to see as someone who influenced me,<sup>80</sup> 'cause he was like a bouncing board, I would bounce things off him. [...] Like, "Why are you doing that? That's stupid" [...] My mom is very interested in philosophy, she's read all the main ones: Sartre, Foucault, Camus, all them, blah blah blah. And we've always talked about philosophy, and politics, as far back as I can remember talking about those things, since I was around 12, 13 [...] She was probably more of an influence, [if] not obviously so, 'cause I was able to have long conversations with her about, like, Bakunin, or Kropotkin, or anyone like that; or, Bonanno, and she would, like – because of her background, her teaching [university lecturing in the humanities] background or whatever, she would be able to have long conversations, and she wouldn't just trail off or say something – just be completely stubborn, like my dad used be. So, she was probably more of an influence than my dad, when I think about it. She would be quite sympathetic to the ideas of anarchism, but she thinks it's unattainable, it's an ideal, that is far off in the sky, obviously you can't reach it; you can try, do your best, but it's unreachable – completely, like, there's no chance you can get there, and em... yeah, that's it, yeah.

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80 I think Diarmuid may have meant this in terms of 'negative', as well as 'positive' influence.

Stefan, who does not tell us of a 'quest' quite like Petey's or Diarmuid's, was nonetheless similarly influenced by his mother (also a member of the 'cultural mass', as it happens). Interestingly, though, whereas Petey and Diarmuid's accounts seem to be primarily of attitudinal or philosophical influences, Stefan's account shows his mother's influence, albeit incidentally, (and in response to a question with a different purpose than those which elicited Petey and Diarmuid's accounts) on an inspirational moment in the growth of Stefan's political consciousness (and a moment similar to those covered in the 'Implantation' section, above):

Stefan: I was actually taken to quite a few protests when I was younger; my mother worked for a newspaper – in [capital city of the former Yugoslavian state where Stefan is from] – and she would have been involved in the social circles – the cultural circles, over there, anything to do with media, really, you know, publishing, media, and everything, and I was taken to quite a few protests about different issues. Like, there was a major...

DD: This is in [name of former Yugoslavian state Stefan is from], yeah?

Stefan: Yeah, and there was this radio station that they wanted to shut down, because in a very piss-take way they were criticising, like, governments and stuff, and public figures, so they wanted to shut them down, and there was this big huge demonstration in the main square, it was just completely full of people, I couldn't give you a figure right now. But I was about seven or eight years of age [...]. It was just kind of a big mass statement, and I remember finding that incredibly appealing, because they didn't shut down the radio station in the end – censored it like hell, but didn't shut it down, and it was kind of, you know... it kind of started me believing that people can get things done, even if the government doesn't like it. [...] it's kind of the first spark [for me] of self-organization and power to the masses, and everything like that.

Malcolm's interview shows us a parental influence that is more direct in *theme*: he sees his father's much less left-liberal, and much more radical influence as tying into where he is 'at' *now*, politically; however, apart from directness of theme or content with regard to Malcolm's current politics, it is hard to know how formative his father's political influences have been for Malcolm's overall development in terms of political consciousness. Here,

Malcolm discusses his father's influence in the context of his turn away from much of what was going on locally in terms of what Bookchin would have called “lifestyle anarchism” (e.g. squatting, 'punk politics' and Crimethinc<sup>81</sup>-inspired 'anarchism'), and towards what Bookchin, again, would call “social anarchism”:

DD: How did you go from looking at that stuff [“lifestyle anarchism”] and seeing that it was irrelevant, to actually getting turned on to new ideas, new political ideas, like you said you were getting more involved in – or, more interested in anarcho-communism and stuff, so... obviously, there was a lot of stuff going on that was irrelevant, but how did you get turned on to, introduced to, the other ideas?

Malcolm: Well, I guess, discussions with my friends, and as well as that my dad was involved in, I guess, left-wing politics when he would have been about my age, and there's a lot of books in my house, like, eh... there's a lot of Marx, Colin Ward books, Kropotkin and stuff like that, and I guess he just turned me on to books like that.

[...]

DD: Do you mind me asking what kind of stuff your dad was involved in?

Malcolm: Eh, he was an anarchist at some stage, and a socialist at another, in the sixties and seventies I guess. But I haven't had a huge amount of conversations with him about it. [...] I guess he had a kid, got a job, and just didn't really have time for it anymore.

As seen above (see 'Anarchists inside?' section), Josie attributes an influential role to her parents (particularly her mother), that is somewhat different to Petey's, Diarmuid's and Malcolm's accounts, in that it is “moral”, rather than “political”. However, we can see vividly the most direct familial influence of any of the informants – politically and culturally – coming from some of Josie's older brothers. Indeed, in Josie's account, the political and cultural influences of her brothers are thoroughly bound up with one another. (In the interview extract below, I use the term “grassroots movement” to

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81 A North American collective primarily concerned with provocative publishing and propaganda, sometimes compared to the Situationists. The kind of people who would say that they are about “anarchy” as opposed to “anarchism”, and who Bookchin would probably have seen as the nerve centre of “lifestyle anarchism”. As Malcolm points out elsewhere in his interview (as does William), at certain times Crimethinc would have been highly influential amongst 'punkier' and 'crustier' circles of anarchists in Dublin.

describe the political archipelago with which Josie aligns herself; this is following her own use of the term earlier in the interview, which reflects the pattern found in Ireland whereby loosely left libertarian, movement of movements-type groups and activities are casually referred to as “grassroots”, or the “the grassroots”, etc., both by people within and outside these spheres (Dunne 2006)<sup>82</sup>

DD: I think I already sort of asked you *why* you were motivated to get involved in social movements, or what you'd call the “grassroots movement”, em... and you said it had a lot to do with moral principles, but I'm also curious about – as opposed to *why* you got involved, I'm also curious as to *how* you got involved, and what I mean by that is sort of the process by which you became attracted to getting involved in the grassroots movement, or, what were...

Josie: Influences, like, sort of thing?

DD: Yeah.

[...]

Josie: Well... my parents, I suppose, are not political [...] My dad used to campaign for Labour [...] I think he's still a member, but he's not active. [...] And, I come from a big family [...], I'm the youngest, so growing up I'd have a lot of older people around me talking older people stuff, so [...] They wouldn't really be that political, but my older brothers would have been a bit radical and into... different music, different social scene and stuff, so I guess it would influence me, it would open up my eyes that, hang on, there are lots of little groups of people and loads of different interests, and you know, there's loads of variety out there, em, and... Yeah, as I got older anyway, my brother started college, and he wasn't really that... I'm gonna say “political”, as the word for being involved in the grassroots movement and stuff like that, but he wasn't that political before he went to college, really. He'd read bits, but wouldn't have become... He wouldn't have... Well, maybe he was more active than I knew and he

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82 As Dunne (2006) points out, this usage derives from the tradition of the “Grassroots Gatherings” (see Cox 2007 and footnote to chapter one). Up to 2005 (since that year the Gatherings have been in hibernation), these 'activist' get-togethers were, somewhat indirectly, an important reference point for movement activities – 'indirectly', because they were not, in theory, organising platforms – while they gave birth to such entities as Dublin Grassroots Network (see footnote to sub-section, 'The quest', above). So, it is not hard to see how the moniker has stuck around. Josie prefers to identify her affiliations as such, in favour of any appellations such as “anarchist”, etc.; indeed, she staunchly refuses *any* specific political or ideological labelling. Of course, this could be related to Graeber's (2002) point about the way that anarchist principles have come to occupy a centre of gravity position in many movement of movements spheres: often not explicitly, that is, but instead reflected in such phenomena as participants' refusal of what they see as the oppressive, exclusive and limiting effects of political labelling!

hadn't told me about stuff until then, and I don't think that would have had anything to do with our relationship, it was just... I don't think he felt as passionate, but anyway... So, he'd be telling me stuff that he'd be learning in college from Global Awareness<sup>83</sup> and other campaigns he's been involved in. So that really would have opened my eyes up. And my other brother, he's... he wasn't really involved in grassroots, but... he would discuss it with me, so that would be how I got started, how I got involved in grassroots movements [...]

He'd be in organizations in London now, but when he was in Amsterdam he wasn't.

DD: What kind of organizations?

Josie: Rising Tide.<sup>84</sup> Yeah, so, my brothers, my family, would have influenced me, and none of my friends from school would have had any influence, or, they wouldn't really have a grassroots bone in their body, they wouldn't have any time for it.

## Friends and lovers

Outside of Josie's experience, such direct links to grassroots politics are found not in family but in friends, lovers and other personal contacts. The unusual – that is, familial – nature of this link for Josie, is reflected in how she views her relationship with her brothers and other family members:

So, no, before I went to college, I wouldn't have had anything in common with my friends politically or whatever... unless you consider your family to be your friends, which a lot of people find weird, but I do.

Also, for Josie, such 'friendship' links with siblings are firmly incorporated into wider social networks and 'political' networks:

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83 On many Irish university campuses, a student group or society exists which represents the local foothold of movement of movements-type sensibilities (not that such groups are in any way homogeneous, or necessarily even very conscious of each other's existence). The Global Awareness Society is NUI Maynooth's answer to this trend, being typically broad in uniting much more 'anarchist'-types and much more 'non-profit sector'-types.

84 A climate change-oriented ecological organisation based in the UK, connected to the UK "direct action movement" tradition.

[...] I would have went along to a few things with my brother and would have met one or two people, but especially when I would have got into college that I would have met his friends, and that was a big thing with me being involved, was that I already, you know, I didn't know them, but I already have a reason to know them, and then I would have got to know them more, so that was a big influence as well.

So whereas family members had much to do with Josie's exposure to grassroots politics, and Petey and Diarmuid's routes towards politics were in large part determined by their own agency, for others, the influence of more or less close non-familial personal acquaintances was much more important.

Here, Stefan discusses his 'conversion', involving friends from a local youth collective – Basta Youth – dedicated primarily to organising punk gigs: (A discussion of the wider significance of Basta Youth will commence below, in the 'Collective effervescence' section.)

Stefan: It [the idea of anarchism] was kind of something that a lot of people knew about before me, and I was like... there was all this kind of... it was just something that I didn't feel like I understand, and a lot of other people, they sort of got up and got a couple of pamphlets and a book or two out on it and stuff, and [I] did a bit of reading and a few of them really made sense [...]

DD: Cool. Ahm... you said that initially, the idea of anarchism would have been something that other people who you knew were into, but for a while – yeah, for a while, it was something that people who you knew were into, but you wouldn't have been too sure what was the story... Was that Basta people or what kind of people? How did you come to be around people who were into...?

Stefan: Yeah, that was mainly from being around people who were involved in Basta, hanging around with them, being at the meetings, going to the concerts and stuff and... it just kind of raised awareness a bit.

Caoimhe's introduction to anarchism, and to involvement in grassroots politics, was through Diarmuid, her boyfriend:

[...] It was only when I met Diarmuid that he opened this kind of door for me, cos I... if you're interested in something like that [anarchism] but you don't know what it is,

you don't know where to look... If you don't have a name for the face you can't really do anything about it [...]

But if a picture of the possible routes to grassroots politics is emerging whereby either one goes out and 'finds' their political home, or else *it* goes and 'finds' them, through friends, lovers, family or whatever, then it might be appropriate to point out that sometimes, this dichotomy is somewhat ambiguous: the lines of 'who-found-who' can be harder than at other times to disentangle; for instance, Malcolm's path to anarchism was influenced by "friends from the punk scene" (as quoted above). But it is clear from the very same sentence that it was also influenced by

seeing Reclaim The Streets when I was a kid, and stuff like that, and [...] seeing stuff like Seattle on the news when I was a kid [... and] just having literature around my house that was there for me to read as well.

And how did he come to have friends in the punk scene anyway? Did they 'find' him, or did he 'find' them? If he 'found' them, was this just because of musical interests, or did the values lying in the background of punk rock culture<sup>85</sup> have anything to do with the attraction? Without downplaying the significance of people talking and reaching out to one another with their ideas – how being introduced to some political (or any) idea by friends is supposed to work – perhaps we should also think about *why* people drift toward certain groups of people, and certain 'scenes', rather than others.

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85 Since its genesis, punk rock has been associated with angry rejection of hegemonic values, of the mainstream music 'industry', etc., and vaguely associated with anarchist ideology ("Anarchy in the UK etc.) and left politics (e.g. The Clash). As many of the first generation punk bands were seen to 'sell out' just like the 1970s 'cock-rock' dinosaurs they defined themselves against, many of the values of punk's more radical edge incubated in more resolutely autonomist and anti-commercial habitats, such as the "DIY" (not quite the same "DIY" as discussed in chapter one!) and "hardcore" scenes (see McKay's (1996) chapter on the punk band Crass). Where vibrant punk scenes exist today, they often take their cues from such latter, more 'political' waves of punk. As William points out in relation to "DIY" bands, "they're nearly all anarchists".

## Collective effervescence

For instance, William's account of his introduction to anarchism hinges on contact with paid-up anarchists, but his drift towards these anarchist habitats comes across as a rather motivated and self-guided one. Here, we start to see more of a picture emerge of a major element in AY's rootedness in social networks and social 'scenes' outside of politics – this is the milieu surrounding the Basta Youth collective, referred to in the above extract from Stefan's interview. Based in the part of North Wicklow colonised by Dublin's southward sprawl, “Basta” was set up by local teenagers in the 2000s, primarily to organise all-ages (i.e. no-alcohol – in theory), not-for-profit, “DIY” gigs, but also vaguely associating itself since its inception with the cause of radical social change, and explicitly basing itself (in theory) on horizontal forms of organisation.<sup>86</sup>

DD: [...] how did you become attracted to the idea of anarchism, or anti-capitalism, or any of those things, how did you become attracted to that originally?

William: Well, like a lot of people involved in music, or whatever, it *was* through music that I first came across ideas like this... Like, I always knew the word “anarchy”, but I never knew exactly what it meant, and like, I always thought it was, like, kind of silly, for years, up until two, two and a half years ago, and em... There was, you know the shop in town, Red Ink?<sup>87</sup> That's now closed down? I originally used to go there, just to record-shop, but eventually I started picking up zines and pamphlets there, and talking to people who work there, and people that came in, and then, from there, I became involved in... I heard there was people in Wicklow, like, down in Kilcoole, and I started talking to people there about it, and I got to... I read about it, and learned about it myself, and from my friends, and eh... discovered that it wasn't just, a kind of very textbook kind of idea of anarchism that we're given from when we're kids, you know, and that it was something else. And that's how I first became interested in it, and eh... then after reading it for a long

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86 Of course, its choice of name signposts as much; nonetheless, the 'politics' of Basta is a constant source of controversy, with many former participants suggesting that as the originally single-figures collective expanded to take in dozens of on-paper members, the original vision for the collective has been lost or diluted. Funnily enough, even the meaning of the name is routinely contested, with some people claiming it *was* inspired by *Ya Basta!*, and some claiming that it wasn't. (As far as I can gather from my informants, it was.)

87 Red Ink was a small shop in the Temple Bar district of Dublin, which lasted for perhaps the best part of a year between 2005 and 2006, selling punk rock-type records and anarchist literature.



time, I found out that there was a lot of stuff in it that I had been thinking myself for a long time, and just never really came across, like, an idea, or a political idea that I could completely 100% agree with, you know. That's basically how I, like, came to be interested in anarchism.

DD: [...] And would you have associated what you heard was going on down in Wicklow, like Basta stuff and everything, would you have associated that with politics, with anarchism, or was that more a music thing?

William: No, that was more of a music thing, but I'd always... The first thing that I discovered that I could completely agree with was the idea of, like, DIY<sup>88</sup> music, and that kind of goes hand-in-hand with anarchism, you know. So, I, like... That was probably only a year and a half ago, when I first became involved in the DIY scene, and eh... that's when I got to know people, like I'd been reading about it for a while, but that's when I got to know people, other than like... Like, I didn't actually know any anarchists, so em... Through DIY music, I got to know people who were interested in DIY, and who I could actually ask about anarchism, you know. And, like, at that stage I didn't know anyone in town [...] It was through a friend in school, who was from Bray, that he introduced me to all these people out in Kilcoole, and the people I met there were the people I got talking to about it first – and that friend.

Of course, it might be suggested that the philosophy of anarchism, or its pursuit, were marginal enough in explaining William's gravitation toward the social networks within which he began to consider himself an anarchist. This development could be seen as little more than incidental; that William moved through the circles he did, motivated primarily by musical interests, and that the culture of those circles was such that anarchist credentials were an almost vital appendage.

But other people moved along similar routes, and were initiated in (explicitly) anarchist ideas via these routes, when music was far less of a factor than it was for William. I have already considered Stefan's introduction to anarchist ideas thanks to friends, but the background to these developments, and the circumstances of how he came to have these friends, are interesting also:

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<sup>88</sup> Again, "DIY" music is not the same thing as the "DIY" culture spoken of by Halfacree (1999), McKay (1996, 1998) *et al*, although of course it could be argued that the two spheres share affinities.

DD: You've sort of got involved in Anarchist Youth, sort of through Basta...

Stefan: Yeah...

DD: And you've said that Basta were sort of the first group you were around where there was some notion of anarchist ideas – you know, it's not an “anarchist” group – but there was some kind of anarchist-*type* ideas circulating around; but Basta also revolves around music – yeah? – around putting on gigs, so... was it the music that brought you to Basta in the first place, would you have been – like, Basta put on a lot of punk gigs and stuff like that – would you have been into punk music before getting involved in Basta, or...?

Stefan: Well, I'll tell you... I discovered and moved on from punk music way before Basta existed, so, at the time, I wasn't much of a punk kid [...] But I would've had a few friends who had attended... now, I would've randomly turned up at a gig or two before it was even Basta [...] And then it kind of formed and only after a while did they start having – at the start there was only five or six people who were in Basta, then they started having open meetings and a lot of other kinda people joined. I kind of just liked the idea of getting involved in helping something – in helping out with a cause that I believed in, that was... you know, providing ourselves with events and entertainment where we wouldn't usually get anything from anyone else, particularly from like the government and things like that [...]. So I just took part in that 'cause I figured I might as well help out . And actually since I haven't really been going to the gigs, since I've kind of moved on from that and they don't really interest me *as much* as they did, and I've kind of been doing other things, I haven't really been going to meetings either. I kind of left Basta a good while back, I reckon it's been a good few months since I went to the last meeting. And I would still like, I would still enjoy quite a lot of the music that gets played, like quite a few [...] bands who would still play Basta would either be friends of mine or I would, like, enjoy their music and stuff, and it... it kind of stays good as a correspondence thing or just kind of knowing people, and back then it was excellent kind of community-wise 'cause we did a little... there's quite a few things that happened apart from gigs, like when, the venue that we used was left all up to us because the contractors said that it wouldn't be used for anything until it was knocked down.<sup>89</sup> We kind of had, like, a few all-night film-showings, where we'd set up a projector across a big screen and just stay there all night. Of course we had quite a few run-ins, very interesting ones actually, with the Guards, and particularly, one of those where we got absolutely abused and the place got trashed by them, I remember they broke in a window, and

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<sup>89</sup> As Stefan suggests, Basta, for a time, essentially had a venue all of their own – a community hall destined for demolition. See W (2006).

then started kicking in a door, and then attacked the first person who opened it, and things like that, and then took down all our names [...]

DD: [...] So, would you say it was more the *idea* of DIY, and of doing things yourself, on a non-commercial basis – that it was more the idea or the principle of those things, more so than the actual music, that attracted you to Basta? If you'd kind of moved on from a lot of punk stuff, and the kind of music that Basta was...?

Stefan: Yeah... I don't know, there was quite a few bands that I would have liked a hell of a lot, but it was kind of... I always kind of believed that people were capable of much more than was put on paper [...], and I was always up for exploring new things, even to just check it out, you know. And if I like, and believe in, what somebody is doing, I'll always try to help out to whatever extent it interests me, or whatever. But, I think it was quite an even mix between the music and whatever other reasons, like, political, or kind of... whatever nature. It was quite 50/50.

What I am getting at, of course, is that in causing currents of social electricity to hop between different, disconnected nodes – of people and potential – grassroots social and cultural endeavours can form more than the sum of their parts (musical parts, as the case may be). Here, Diarmuid explains the significance of the Basta scene as a bedrock of sociality against which the Anarchist Youth project was able to leverage itself; but as opportune as this situation may have been, he takes care to point out that (for him, at least), Basta did not represent anything political:

Diarmuid: I knew a good few of the people [in Anarchist Youth] socially, and some through politics, and I'd always been interested in the idea of an anarchist youth group, so I decided to help out as much as I could.

DD: [...] How did you come to know other people socially, I mean other people who went on to be in Anarchist Youth?

Diarmuid: Well there's... Mainly through a group called Basta, which is a youth group which sets up its own gigs, mainly punk stuff, that sort of genre. And it's supposed to be based on libertarian principles – not specifically anarchist principles – but a number of the people in Basta happened to be anarchists, or happened to become anarchists or whatever.

DD: So, you would have got to know some of those Basta people pretty much through gigs and stuff?

Diarmuid: Yeah, basically.

DD: Like, gigs here in town, in Dublin?

Diarmuid: Eh, no, mainly – for the most part, the core group of Basta live in the suburbs of the very south, so, Bray, Wicklow, Kilcoole, stuff like that. They had their own space for a while, which was in Greystones, where most of the gigs were. And, sort of, it's a bit gone now, so.

DD: Yeah. And so... so, you were going to gigs down in Greystones and stuff like that?

Diarmuid: Mm-hm.

DD: But you're not – you're from, around Stillorgan, or?

Diarmuid: Yeah.

DD: So how did you – seeing as how they're all based around Bray and Greystones and stuff like that, how did you come to know about Basta, or how did you come to start travelling out to Greystones and stuff, and places like that, to go out to gigs?

Diarmuid: Well, eh, I think there was one or two members in my school who used to put up posters, and... I came to know Basta through that. And, eh, looking them up on the internet, obviously, and stuff – they have a forum on the internet. So I just became interested – just for the music, not for political reasons, just to go along and have a... good time.

DD: Em... So... So, people who are involved in Basta, and involved in setting up gigs and stuff like that, they were kind of a, a bit of a core – maybe not the only core, but they were kind of one core, or one base of people that was involved in – that Anarchist Youth was kind of based on, yeah?

Diarmuid: Mmmm... [sounds like he's not sure]

DD: Was there a social circle there, or maybe a couple of different social circles that Anarchist Youth was kind of built on, would you say, or...

Diarmuid: Mmmm... It would probably actually be mainly – actually, if I think about it, it would be mainly on the Basta social circle, but eh... See, the thing is, because Basta is so widespread, there's quite a lot of people who would travel from the other side of town, or from town, people who live in town – like, they wouldn't go frequently, but like sporadically, now and then; a lot of the people who joined Anarchist Youth, I would have recognized from Basta gigs or whatever... I think... It's not completely on a Basta social circle, but a good few of like – maybe 40, 50% of [Anarchist Youth participants] would've been frequently in Basta Youth, but I think they still [inaudible]. I'm not sure, I don't really go [to Basta events] anymore, so...

However, despite what Diarmuid says about Basta being just about music, it would seem that, as is the case for Stefan – another non-punk – it was *not* quite just the music that attracted him. It would seem that, partly at least, he was drawn towards the orbit of Basta by its aura of grassroots and autonomist<sup>90</sup> “collective effervescence” (to dip a little into the language of Durkheim<sup>91</sup>):

DD: [...] Would you have shared common musical interests with them [Basta people]?

Diarmuid: Em... At the time not really, 'cause I used to go to the gigs to get hammered [laughs], so... It was nothing – even the last one or two, which was a couple of years ago – I probably went to one a year and a half ago, and the music was alright, but it wasn't the best, not to my taste anyway, it was – we didn't really share common musical unity or whatever, we weren't united by that, it was probably just teenagers talking crap for ages, and... interestingly enough, a lot of them did talk about interesting things, like politics, every now and again, you would get them to talk about that, if they weren't talking about music, which they did. I was never preoccupied by music, that's what I'm saying, whereas it was their life, and I was never like that, even though I play guitar [...]

DD: So what made you go to those gigs, if you weren't going for the music – well, obviously, to get hammered – but why get hammered at a Basta gig as opposed to anywhere else?

Diarmuid: Eh, I knew some of the people from my school who went there; I liked the people who went there – I was a sort of a rocker at the time, punk – well, not a punk, but a rocker, sort of; I liked the people there, they're quite nice... I suppose, the same kind of thing could've happened if I'd went to Blast, the sort of metal gigs in town; I could've turned into a goth or something, so... And I mightn't like them, that social circle, but it happened that I went to... well, gigs like that, run by young people, em... I liked the idea of it being run by young people, that there was no bouncers, most of the time, there was no older people round, usually, there was just... maybe in their twenties, but they were part of the social circle as well, or they were playing or whatever, and they were real sound. So basically, went to a couple 'cause I would know some people [...], and, I suppose I just liked it, liked the scene or whatever.

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90 The term 'autonomist' has become closely associated with 'autonomist Marxism', but I use it here simply to mean 'for or concerned with autonomy'.

91 For a consideration of how Durkheim's concept might be related to the study of social movements, see Crossley (2002).

Thus, such projects as Basta have the power to cut across youth-subcultural lines; to pull in non-punks to their punk rock-fests, in large part simply because people like the idea of what they are doing, and also partly because of the intoxicating taste it gives them not just for surreptitious cans of beer (as Diarmuid initially seems to suggest), but for organising social life in a bottom-up, grassroots way, autonomously from what usually seem like inescapable rubrics – in this case, market, state and gerontocracy. In terms of intoxicating freedom, I am thinking here of Diarmuid's image of “teenagers talking crap for ages”, and Stefan's recollection of how Basta was “excellent community-wise”, allowing participants to hold all-night film showings, or whatever, because they could – a deviant freedom to which the police were not oblivious.

Just how far is the reach of such projects, though, in cultural terms? Stefan and Diarmuid are not exactly punks, but they are not exactly 'mainstream' either. Without going into too much detail, it might be worthwhile to give an idea of their appearances: Diarmuid has long hair and wears scruffy t-shirts and jeans; Stefan wears suit jackets, wild hairstyles and piercings in his face. To borrow a word from Josie's interview (one that is seriously limited in its explanatory power), then, the way that both informants present themselves is vaguely 'alternative'.<sup>92</sup>

So, even if projects such as Basta have some power to transcend subcultural boundaries, the question remains: “how much?” In Petey's account, below, of AY's capacity to attract new people, we can see the problem it faces as a group built to some extent (however inadvertently) around pre-existing social networks – in this case, the networks of Basta and those that intersect with them:

Petey: [...] at our last meeting we had two new people which weren't from our social circles, or friends of friends, or in, you know, our vast different circles, so I think it's

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92 The concept of 'alternative' represents a can of worms: I pointed out in chapter two that there is nothing necessarily oppositional about things that are 'alternative'; but I think a lesson from my interview data is that, sometimes, 'alternative' culture can throw up reference points for people in how they locate themselves politically. See, in particular, the extracts from Josie's interview, below.

great that people who we didn't know got involved, and we can only hope it'll happen again.

[...]

[...] One of them, I think, would be into totally different music to us, wouldn't really live where most of us may live [...] so it's great to see it has – Anarchist Youth has broken out of the kind of vague, punk, like, Basta Youth kind of social circles which we were just working out of for a couple of months.

And though Petey's exposition of this problem comes in the context of discussing AY's degree of success in breaking out of it, the fact that the appearance of two new people from outside certain social circles seems like a success in this context speaks volumes about how much the problem itself has become taken for granted as a baseline, or set of horizons framing the scope for what the group can achieve.

We appear to have a strange paradox here. On the one hand, I think we have a snapshot of how voluntarisms<sup>93</sup> like AY (as well as much larger ones) tend to find roots in social worlds that are not just anchored in the 'political' stratosphere of social movements, but embedded in the organic relationships of everyday life – the bonds of shared culture and community (and funnily enough, the kinds of spaces that are among the most impervious to the gaze of power, and the gaze of the intellectuals and technicians employed by power – that is, sociologists and the like). This is the kind of relationship that facilitates the collective effervescence through which like-minded people stop feeling like marginal, isolated individuals, and feel meaning and dynamism in their affinity. I would sum this up as the difference between the depressing and isolating feeling of calling a political meeting or a protest and finding that no-one but you and the other one or two people organising the event turns up, and the feeling of organising an event and seeing news of it spread by word of mouth, and seeing a 'buzz' around the event whereby it, and events like it, become incorporated into the everyday effervescence of wider social networks. I would suggest that this effervescence – the feeling of being part of not just a clique, but

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93 I use the term 'voluntarisms' *very loosely* (but not pejoratively) in the way that, I think, Gramsci (1971) used it – that is, to mean something like a political 'activist' group, or a group of political militants.

of a wide, diverse and dynamic set of intersecting social networks – is the lifeblood of any voluntarist endeavour, political or otherwise.

And I would suggest that it is just the converse to this dynamic and effervescent aspect of the relationship that gives birth to the subterranean fields of activity perhaps more often associated with counterpower and anti-power<sup>94</sup> – signposted, if not captured, by the image of the 'underground railroads' of history (to borrow a term from the context of US slavery and resistance to it): this can be seen in the way that groups of New Left urban guerrillas such as the Weather Underground were able to successfully evade massive federal dragnets by going to ground in the nooks and crannies of the US counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s, despite their faces and identities being plastered across the news media; the way that when Ulrike Meinhof decided to ditch her family life and journalist career to join the armed struggle in the same period, she was able to shuck her children on to a bunch of “hippies” who would vanish with them and rear them in her place (Becker 1977); the way that IRA on-the-runs could remain on-the-run in the embattled and isolated republican ghettos of the six counties, as well as the rest of the island – not exactly a territory with lots of vast and unpopulated jungles, mountains and badlands to hide out in (and this is not to mention the task of helping to sustain what was until recently one of the most formidable clandestine armed struggle organisations in the world, as well as the massive infrastructure surrounding it, while doing so – another rather neat trick).

On the other hand, that would seem to be all well and good when this kind of effervescent, organic relationship is between a voluntarism and a wider culture, or community, that is *mass* in scale, as in the above examples. But that is not obviously the case with voluntarisms such as AY. In fact, the wider culture or community to which AY finds its organic relationship is, on the face of it at least, rather marginal; a constituency

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94 As Graeber (2004:34) points out (with a discussion of what he considers the unrecognised revolution in 1980s Madagascar in the background), “The contemporary world is riddled with such anarchic spaces, and the more successful they are, the less likely we are to hear about them. It's only if such a space breaks down into violence that there's any chance outsiders will even find out it exists.” Actually, this theme has become rather fashionable of late – for example, Ryan (2006) uses something like it to tie his recent epic travelogue of revolutionary tourism together.



eloquently described by Stefan as “white trash, middle class, kind of punk rock teenagers”.<sup>95</sup> In this context, the cultural or communal identity to which the voluntarism in question is organically related can in fact be seen as a barrier to the voluntarism's outreach. To put it in crude terms: if the fact of the voluntarism's organic relation to a given cultural or communal identity means that that voluntarism develops a way of speaking to elements within that cultural-communal arc, this is a good thing (from an old-school revolutionary perspective) if the radius of that arc is wide, bringing potentially a critical mass of people within range of the voluntarism's message; but if the cultural-communal arc is not wide, then the masses of people outside it remain immune to the voluntarism's message, for it has not developed ways of speaking to them.

To get more 'theoretical' about it, what I am talking about here is an issue that hews closely to much of the subject matter of that archipelago of theory retooling concepts hinging on the opposition of '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*' within a postmodern perspective; the conceptual territory of “neotribes” and of “new sociations”, of the opposition between the social and sociality.<sup>96</sup> To leave aside for a moment the deep problematics of some of this literature – for example, what is sometimes a celebration of ephemerality that becomes hard to distinguish from self-indulgent and meaningless bourgeois titillation,<sup>97</sup> and the worst of the postmodernist paralysis (nay complicity) in the face of an ascendant “free market fundamentalism” (Graeber 2001; Graeber 2002) – I must acknowledge that it is not without relevance in relation to the predicament I am considering. It is indeed very easy to see both AY, and the Basta milieu from which AY drew much of its energy, as entangled to some degree, for better or worse, within neotribal webs.

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95 To be more precise, Stefan describes this as the constituency of anarchism in general, as opposed to just AY, but I think his description is appropriate here.

96 For an overview, see Halfacree (1999). Halfacree points out that the connections between the different islands of this archipelago are not always made very clear or explicit.

97 As Halfacree (1999) points out, Bookchin (1995) is the most astute on this count, specifically with reference to Hakim Bey's (aka Peter Lamborn Wilson) (1991) endlessly and uncritically cited *Temporary Autonomous Zones* – a text beyond the margins of academia but nonetheless echoing much of the valorization of neotribalism found in Maffesoli (1996), etc.

Taking Maffesoli's (1996) concept of neotribalism as a condition whereby “the 'polydimensionality of the lived experience' (Maffesoli 1989, 4) – sociality – has increasingly surpassed more formal, abstract and fixed positions – the social – as the organizational basis of everyday life” (Halfacree 1999:211); where people adopt an “*elective sociality* (Maffesoli 1996, 86)... reflecting their *puissance* or 'will to live' (Maffesoli 1991,31) – an irrepressible celebration of our humanity” (Halfacree *Ibid*; original emphasis) – all carried out within a wider “search for community and belonging, the loss of which appears to be a defining moment of the postmodern condition” (Halfacree *Ibid.*), Halfacree's analysis of the phenomenon of “closure” found within neotribal contexts seems to parallel the predicament of AY in aspiring to break out of the “vague, punk... Basta youth social circles” (Petey) within which it had been forced to operate since its inception. Writing in the context of a “DIY movement” land occupation in London in 1996 (and with the 1990s UK anti-roads movement in the background of his analysis), Halfacree (1999:217) notes that:

Neotribal groupings are characterized by the celebration of their identity – in overt styles of dress, language, behaviour, etc... Whilst this sense of distinctiveness reinforces the crystallization of the group from the mass, it can also lead to a degree of closure. As such, this puts up a strong cultural barrier against many new potential members of the group... in other words, neotribes are often very tribal.

So, what can we say about this problem? At this point, it might be obvious (or perhaps it might not!) that we are no longer simply talking about the predicaments faced by AY; for AY's predicaments are, in fact, nothing less than a prism refracting the key problems being looked at in the first chapter of this thesis – from movement concerns about summit-hopping not being 'class struggle' enough, to concerns about 'giving up activism', and, for that matter, 'activistism'; and so on.

It should be clear (if implicit), I think, from my framing of collective effervescence, culture, and community as the lifeblood of 'political' voluntarisms, that I do not think that it is good enough for radicals to simply eschew any affinity with social and cultural formations other than strictly 'class' ones – a direction in which many movement actors

are leaning, as emphasis on “class struggle” sees a resurgence in movement discourses, at the same time as the actual content of that term continues to look slipperier and slipperier (see Breathnach 2005).

This trend is not lost on most of my informants. With the exception of Josie – the only one of my informants who could be fit into a “traditional working class” category (I say “could be fit”, rather than “fits”, as Josie personally renounces any class identity) – all of them make reference to class as a factor in their politics (while Josie rejects class as a factor in her political outlook). Moreover, several of the AY informants emphasise that their politics are based on a class struggle perspective, and most stress their rejection of “lifestyle” anarchism, such as squatting and refusal of work. (The interviews with Stefan and Josie – who, with dreadlocks and a hippy cum skater dress sense, was incidentally the most “counter cultural”-looking of my informants – did not produce any insights of this nature.) When it is considered that the influx of Basta members into AY around the time of its inception represented (for most, if not all, of those concerned) a *migration*, or even a *defection* – with a serious rift within Basta over the issue of direction in the background to this development – a whiff can be detected of Hetherington's (1994) analysis of the countervailing orientations toward *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* contained within the instability of what he calls the 'new sociations' – a concept that Halfacree (1999:214) relates to neotribalism. In other words, these forces pull alternately towards an accentuation or “naturalization” of the group's “tribal” character, on the one hand (towards *Gemeinschaft*, that is) – emphasising a “reskilling of identity” involving the “growth of support networks, empowering friendships, personal fulfillment, local participation and concern, and the emergence of a distinct form of *life*” (as opposed to “lifestyle”) (Halfacree 1999:216; original emphasis); and on the other hand, a “reskilling of participation” (*Gesellschaft*), emphasising “more abstract means of empowerment”, involving the building of new social institutions, and interaction with existing ones (*Ibid.*).

From this perspective, AY can be seen as an attempt to draw on experiences such as that of Basta and build on those foundations in a more *Gesellschaft* direction. Meanwhile,

AY's struggle with 'closure' can be seen as a hangover from its neotribal origins. But something is missing from this view. If this account is to equate the orientation towards *Gesellschaft* with the transcendence of closure, then it is interesting to look at Stefan's reflection on the contrast between Basta and AY (Stefan was one of those who 'graduated' from Basta to AY, but unlike some of the other AY members (both ex-Basta and otherwise), he has nothing negative to say about the direction which Basta has taken):

People in Basta would have been of a much more similar background than people in Anarchist Youth. There are people in Anarchist Youth who would be of very different ages, and who would live in different parts of Dublin and things like that, whereas in Basta it was often people who went to the same school and kind of spent a fair bit of time together,<sup>98</sup> and eh... [...] The community developed and shared its ideas. So, I think Basta was a much more kind of communal thing than Anarchist Youth is... Anarchist Youth is more of an organisation that gets specific events done and then moves on. And actually, there was an interesting point brought up [...]. There was a speaker, now, a while back, and he said that anarchism, in the way that I think Anarchist Youth approach it, but maybe not so much as black bloc protesters and, as you call them, window-trashers, or whatever, approach it, in the sense of constant rebelling against the government, and trying to bring it down, and trying to spark as much resistance... This guy was saying that we should go about it in a completely different way, where we start building an anarchist society bit by bit instead of destroying the current one, and we should basically do that as a series of communal efforts, which is what Basta were doing, in autonomously organising concerts and events, kind of spreading the idea that we can do things ourselves, and we don't have to rely on the government and the state... And he said that if things were approached in this way, the government couldn't really do anything about it, and it would be much more accessible to people, because at the moment, it's like the people that the idea of anarchism would be accessible to would usually be the kind of white trash, middle class, sort of punk rock teenagers, and if it was done in a more constructive, communal way, it would be much more available to anybody, much more open to anybody, and

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98 This could be seen as conflicting with what Diarmuid says, above, about the diffuse or "widespread" nature of Basta; I think that the best way to understand this apparent contradiction is to suppose that a core Basta membership, based in Wicklow, constitutes a centre of gravity anchoring a wider Basta community. Indeed, William would seem to be a core (ex-)member, even though he has always lived in Blackrock.

there would be very few criticisms that could be made about it, so I think that's a very good point [...]

The interesting thing about this is that Stefan associates the more overtly political and more died-in-the-wool anarchist initiatives such as AY with the problem of closure, and more *Gemeinschaft*-type projects such as Basta with the capacity to transcend such closure. Furthermore, we can interpret all of this as a process by which AY, in the move away from *Gemeinschaft* towards *Gesellschaft*, rather than transcending the problem of closure, actually loses some of its capacity to speak to people in a human way – a thoroughly *Gemeinschaft* quality. Here, we are back to my paradox: what, at this point in the argument, I could call the conflict between the pulls toward *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* within the context of a political voluntarism. But how can this contradiction be resolved? In its *Gesellschaft* ambitions, AY may have lost something that Basta had. But the people who got AY off the ground – including (ex-)Basta members – did not do so just for the craic: they were attempting to fill a gap that projects such as Basta did not, or perhaps could not, fill.

Are we back to a problem of scale? Would the *Gemeinschaft*-type ambience of spaces such as Basta be more conducive to building political voluntarisms out of if they were simply less marginal and more broad-based and accessible, like the 'counter cultures' of the 1960s and 1970s New Left and of Irish republicanism that I referred to earlier?

Actually, there is a serious danger in thinking this way.

### **Thinking counter culture(s)**

In what seem like downtimes of struggle (or 'down-places'), it is all too easy to idealise achievements and moments realised elsewhere and at other times, and treat these moments as benchmarks of where we would like to be at. But it is easy to treat these moments as such, not just because they represent where we want to be in a positive sense,

i.e. where they stand in relation to a potential revolutionary situation, but negatively, i.e. where they stand in relation to our position, which is taken to be a rather lowly one in terms of access to revolutionary possibilities. In other words, the moments we idealise may be as handicapped as we are in terms of leverage towards a revolutionary situation, but they look a lot more impressive than what we've got, so that's something!

I employ an element of caricature here – but I am also talking about something quite serious. Speaking from (among other things) personal experience, I think it is extremely easy to forget – or rather, to not think – about the brick walls which past movements have run up against – somewhat like 'closure' on a bigger scale: the 'pillarisation' of the autonomist and alternative scenes and left subcultures in Germany and Italy from the late 1960s right through to the 1990s, and up to the present in some cases, which made it relatively easy to realise consistently robust mobilisations from within those social spheres, but extremely difficult to mobilise outside these horizons (Cox 1999; 2006); the inability of the US counter culture of the 1960s and 1970s to definitively eschew lines of class, race and gender stratification, or to sustain itself and its values in the face of co-optation; and so on.

I would not suggest for a moment that radicals should not remember and even celebrate these moments; I am simply suggesting that when we reflect on them, it should be in a critical manner; we should consider that when these movements failed (in their immediate objectives, that is), it may not have been the case that they were just “one last push” (Cox 2006) away from success – that history could have gone one way or the other – and that, as the chips fell, the moments of opportunity happened to slip through their fingers; and we should consider that as impressive as the apogees reached by these movements were, perhaps there were in-built problems that limited their capacity to 'go the distance' in revolutionary terms.

What I am getting at is that scale is not the only thing we should be thinking about in trying to work out how a radical *Gemeinschaft*, or counter culture, could become an arena for mass revolutionary movements to crystallize out of, rather than a problematical

source of closure for political voluntarisms to struggle with. And what I am suggesting is not that scale is not of central importance in such equations – I am suggesting that thinking in purely quantitative terms can tell us nothing about *why*, say, the autonomist and alternative scenes of Germany and Italy could never grow past a certain point. Thinking in this way leads on to a tautology: these movements could never grow past a certain point because they were not big enough. Perhaps this problem is a more qualitative one, coming down to how we think about culture – or rather cultures.

Would it be tenable to hypothesise that when we talk about cultures and subcultures – including when we talk about cultural closure – we are used to thinking of different cultures and subcultures as being like hegemonies and mini-hegemonies? As quasi-oppressive systems that impose a logic which subjects are expected to internalise and conform to; not the most open or accessible of things, because who wants to be subject to a form of hegemonic control? If so, this habit might not be entirely without grounding – that is, it may be because a lot of the time, this is what culture is like. (Funnily enough, such a view parallels certain primitivist and anti-civilisation arguments regarding the inherently oppressive nature of culture – not merely 'oppressive' cultures, that is, just culture!)

From this perspective, I wonder if it would be possible to hypothesise that the autonomist and alternative movements in Germany and Italy could never grow beyond the points that they did, because – as grassroots, democratic and open as they may have been (in theory, perhaps – or perhaps even compared to cultures and subcultures in general) – they never completely transcended this quasi-hegemonic blueprint for how culture 'works', and so they were destined to run up against the brick walls imposed by cultural closure?

This observation would appear to sit rather uneasily with the rationale presented above for linking my primary research project in this thesis with the bigger questions I have been looking at, concerned with how hegemonic crises come about. I suggested that my informants might be worth studying because the articulation of latent counterpower into full-blown revolutionary counter cultures has to be initiated somewhere – being no less

bound up in agency than what anthropologists call ethnogenesis – and these candidates might represent as good a place as any other to start in looking for clues as to what resources this process might draw on.

But at this point in the argument, the notion that revolutionary counter cultures can be generalised to such critical mass proportions is looking shaky. Indeed, I have more or less suggested that because of the quasi-hegemonic nature of cultures and subcultures, and because of the problem of closure that accompanies this, counter cultures seem to be limited in their potential for growth: they can be big, but is their growth not capped, preventing them from achieving truly 'critical mass' proportions? And come to think of it, do Graeber's (2004) examples of revolutionary ethnogenesis not parallel this problem? Graeber may have a point when he suggests that traditional excuses for refusing to compare 'modern' and 'primitive' societies ultimately reflect little more than crude prejudice – and quantitative differences, of course. But if we *can* talk quantitatively for a moment, we might remember that Graeber acknowledges that his examples of egalitarian, counterpower societies deriving from processes of revolutionary ethnogenesis tend to be thoroughly marginal, tiny and even short-lived in relation to their neighbours – like the examples of “pirate utopias”, and of communities of escaped slaves and European sailors going off to 'become Indians', served up by Peter Lamborn Wilson (1996 etc.). Quantitatively, then – and in proportion to wider population groups – are these revolutionary cultures not capped, in terms of their ability to foment revolutionary social change on a mass scale, in a similar way to the 'Western' counter cultures?

Perhaps. But I also suggested that these problems might have to do with how we think of cultures, or counter cultures, as well as how cultures 'objectively' work. For perhaps once we reflect upon these problem, we can ask: Are all cultures quasi-hegemonic in the way described above? Do they have to be?

I have already discussed how spheres of counter culture can be dogged by this problem. But perhaps this is not the whole story of counter culture. Perhaps an answer to this problem might be to work towards an *anti*-hegemonic, as opposed to *counter*-hegemonic,



counter culture; a cultural formation that is resistant to the problem of closure because it revolves around values of autonomy and diversity, built around social endeavours that, in cultural terms, are *negative*, rather than positive; for instance, social endeavours that create autonomous zones (*temporary* if they have to be, but *permanent* preferably) liberated from the control of market and state, that facilitate the articulation of new cultures not according to any counter-hegemonic blueprint, but in a spirit of autonomy from any such rubric – a spirit of anti-hegemony, resistant to the tribal and hegemonic problems associated with the emergence of lines of cultural closure, but united by a cultural innovation that does matter: the elaboration and adoption of common revolutionary values.

Of course, to say all this is to leave oneself massively open to charges of triteness and of romanticism: to charges that things about 'autonomy' (both in the sense of 'physical' autonomous zones and in the sense of 'autonomism' in personal values) have been said before, and that in saying them here, they are no less vague and airy than when they were said previously. Thus, I will have to flesh out and qualify what I am saying; but before I start building such sandcastles in the air, I will start off by building up a picture of how the seeds of what I am talking about may already exist in what may be called counter culture, in spite of the quasi-hegemonic currents that lie alongside them.

### **In search of anti-hegemony**

Towards the end of Chapter Two, I suggested that we might view those disparate currents that may be called counter cultural as just one part (or just one legacy) of a much greater wellspring of counterpower which can be seen to have been unfurling across a wide expanse of the twentieth century (and beyond), encompassing moments which would not usually be associated with counter culture as classically understood, but whose borders with this counter culture are at multiple points contiguous, permeable and overlapping. I suggested that what unites the disparate moments of this “unfinished cultural revolution” are impulses towards freedom and self-determination: the will to live a “fully human

life”,<sup>99</sup> in the way that one desires. And I suggested that youth movements have played a vanguard role of sorts on this field of contestation. Thus, whereas McKay (1996) argues for the continuity of the “cultures of resistance” of the 1960s onwards – from the hippies, to the punks, to even the ravers (in some respects), and so on – I argue that this continuity stretches in other directions as well, taking in, for example, many of the “working class” youth subcultures studied by the CCCS, which predate and are routinely divorced from the youth movements deemed “counter cultural”.

Many of these movements and moments, then, were defined by the impulses they harboured for self-determination, and self-valorisation; qualities not unlike those of Maffesoli's (1996) neotribalism, but that give the lie to the *postmodern* character attributed to such phenomena by Maffesoli (for they have been around longer than anything that could be called “postmodern”). I would argue that the legacies of these moments can be found today, and that if these moments have, in a sense, constituted 'technologies'<sup>100</sup> for realising impulses toward freedom and self-determination, then within those legacies, the 'codes' of such technology still exist.

Josie discusses the liberating nature of what she calls “self-definition”:

DD: As you were being influenced by your brothers – and maybe there was other influences as well – if you sort of started gravitating towards... you know, on one side the kind of politics of being involved in grassroots movements, but also the kind of cultural side, in terms of music, and whatever clothes you wear and all that kind of stuff – do you think that was a simultaneous thing, or do you think the politics came first, or the cultural side came first, or was it just mish-mashed all together? [...]

Josie: [...] Ok... I would have been – before I was political, I would have been more *alternative* – that's the buzzword for the moment – [...] but, I suppose, as I became – there was a stage of self-definition, and just kind of realising what do I wanna do, and what direction do I wanna go, and that would have been... it would have been

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99 To borrow a phrase from Cox and Nilsen (2005b) in another context.

100 I am thinking here of Geoghegan's (2000) use of the concept of 'technology'.

simultaneous between the political and the cultural, that they both just excelled,<sup>101</sup>  
'cause I would have been at the age where I, you know, I started college, and you  
know, it just... the whole world is opened up to you, and it just – it's not school,  
basically. And, it would've been simultaneous... [...]

Josie suggests that her experience would have been paralleled to certain degrees by those of the two brothers closest to her in age: Derek (who I know personally), at five years older than Josie, the closest in age, with whom she has most in common in terms of mutual friends and political involvements (Derek attended the same university as Josie, taking the same course); and Noel, ten years older than Josie and second closest in age, who has recently begun to mirror the interests of his younger siblings:

Josie: [...] My other brother would've been... I would've defined him as being a knacker, but he denies it down to the ground, but I honestly... he was a knacker. [DD laughs; Josie starts laughing as well] And then, like, alternative, grassroots, sort of thing, so...

DD: [Is this] Derek [that you're talking about]?

Josie: Yeah... I think Derek was a knacker. I mean... he wore Ben Sherman shirts and [would] drink up in the park, and, I mean, *I* did that, and I'm okay with that, fine, like I would've been what's defined as "a knacker" when I was 12 or 13, and he would've been the same, but, I think -

DD: Did he have long hair then? [Derek now has long hair.]

Josie: No. He had, you know, like, gelled hair...

[...]

Actually, for me and two of my brothers [Derek and Noel], it's *exactly* the same situation, like... I've never asked them this question, so I'm just thinking of seeing them, but... it would've been exactly the same of going into college... that they would've met people that were like-minded, and their friends from Artane, or, from generally where I grew up, they wouldn't have had the same interests, sort of thing... Yeah, that's weird actually, I never copped that before. So yeah, we would've had the same, similar... And, you know, I think... I'd like to think we would influence each other, like the way we're going through... Well, me and Noel are going through... He's in his final year in college, so we would've been in college around the same kind of

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101 I think that here and elsewhere, when Josie uses the term "excel", she means it in the sense of qualities, or interests, or inclinations *flourishing*.

time, would've started getting interested in things the same sort of time, but I think, we'd basically talk about things to each other, and help each other out [...]

DD: So, even though Noel'd be a good bit older than you, you'd say that by virtue of the fact that ye would've been starting college around the same time, that in funny ways, ye're actually having sort of parallel experiences? [...]

Josie: Yeah, yeah I would say that.

DD: And not just, like, you're both doing exams and stuff like that?

Josie: [Laughs] No, no. I mean, politically, culturally, involved in grassroots networks, would've been about the same time.

DD: [...] And so, do you think for Derek as well [...] it was a case of his sort of "alternative-ness" only – he only really sort of got the chance to develop that when he was in college, that it was only then that that was really able to flourish or whatever?

Josie: Like, I think... I should say that, before [starting a liberal arts degree course at university and meeting the "like-minded people" referred to above], Derek went to DIT, and then he went to Amsterdam for a while, so I didn't see him for a long time, so I mean, he could've been involved in craazy shit in Amsterdam and I wouldn't know about it...

DD: Derek lived in Amsterdam?

Josie: Yeah. Noel used to live in Amsterdam, and Derek moved over to him. And now he's [Derek] moved over to London [where Noel has moved to since living in Amsterdam]... [laughs] Em, but... [pause] I think Derek had the *potential* before he went to college, but excelled, and found the medium to express himself, and... yeah, express himself more. Getting contacts, getting to know more people, getting to do more things, and stuff like that.

In the central roles that branching out from home, school and locale played in processes of 'identity formation', Josie reckons that her experiences, and those of Derek and Noel, have diverged from those of her older siblings. But there may yet be a connection between the older siblings' experiences and the processes by which Josie, Derek and Noel gravitated toward "grassroots" movements and "alternative" culture. While she paints a picture of hegemonic cultural homogeneity amongst her peers in Artane, the part of Dublin City where she grew up, Josie describes a very different situation for her older brothers. (That is, not Derek or Noel; Josie is the youngest of six children, with four brothers and one sister; there are two brothers older than Derek and Noel.) We have already seen (in the 'Family Matters' section, above) Josie point out that

They wouldn't really be that political, but my older brothers would have been a bit radical and into... different music, different social scene and stuff, so I guess it would influence me, it would open up my eyes that, hang on, there are lots of little groups of people and loads of different interests, and you know, there's loads of variety out there [...]

It is interesting at this point to dwell a little further on *how* Josie's older brothers came to have these orientations:

DD: I'm wondering was it the same or was it different for your brothers, 'cause obviously they were generationally different [...] Do you think they had the same experience as you, when they would have been getting interested in "alternative" things, whether they were to do with music, or to do with lifestyle, or to do with politics, do you think that they had the same experience of none of their mates in Artane having any interest? Or do you think maybe in their day it was different, do you think maybe, when they were the age you were when you were getting interested in those things, do you think maybe things were different, and, actually, there *were* people around Artane, or around where you're from, that would have been into the same things?

Josie: Em, well, I think for the older few it would've been different than me, 'cause... [pause] there were a lot more kids in the estate; it's like an older estate now, and I'm the youngest, so there was barely any kids around [inaudible], and, also, like, they used to let the kids go out on the road and just play on the road and stuff, whereas for me, it was like, get out the back garden where it's safe, sort of thing, and I think it was just different; there was more people around, em... bigger scenes as well, just from hearing stories and stuff from my brothers, it was very, like... you know, you were either a goth, or a punk, or a mod, and it was very defined. It was just a bigger... I dunno how you'd explain it, I guess just more defined scene, you were just... I guess, pigeonholed alternatively, you know... yeah, it was more noticeable, I think...<sup>102</sup> [...] my oldest brother has always been a mod [...] My other brother, he changes every day [...] I think he was a punk a lot of the time when he was growing up, and now at the moment he's just testing everything out, but he was a pretty hardcore punk when

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102 This account would chime with Coulter's point about increasing homogeneity – in terms of 'style' – as Ireland moved towards its Celtic Tiger twilight.

he was younger. And of course, like, for them, as well, drugs would have been everywhere – absolutely everywhere, for them, so...

DD: What kind of drugs?

Josie: Acid. [...] I guess it would've been early nineties – well, maybe late eighties, early nineties, it would've been all that hard house, dance, Happy Mondays, sort of thing, that was coming in [...] So, that was part of their culture.

Here, the matrix for the older brothers' 'radicalism' and orientation towards “different music, different social scenes”, becomes their experience of a much different social world – in terms of youth culture – than that experienced by Josie in growing up in Dublin: one very clearly shaped by the 'tribalism' of the great youth movements of the twentieth century.

But if one obvious feature of this tribalism is the apparent obligation it imposes upon people to choose from a set list of subcultural identities within which to “pigeonhole” themselves: whether mod, goth or punk, etc., as pointed out by Josie – it would, of course, be reductive to see this situation in entirely oppressive terms. Indeed, is there not a certain dimension to this situation that is less oppressive and more liberating? And is the picture of stratification along subcultural lines not complicated by a sense of fluidity and permeability across the various subcultural zones?

For while Josie emphasises how well-defined the boundaries between the different subcultural groupings were – mods and punks, say, in the case of her two oldest brothers – she also gives examples of common reference points on this landscape, such as (for better or worse) LSD and dance music culture; as neither of these reference points are 'indigenous' to mod or punk culture, I think we can take this as a snapshot of the kind of permeability and crossover possible between the different groups. In ways, this portrait even evokes a sense of the tribal matrix of these subcultures as a melting pot of sorts, in which people could move between different identities. Moreover, the presence of this superstructure of subcultural identities at a fundamental level allowed young people opportunities to escape the hegemonic homogeneity of mainstream culture.

Things were different for the younger siblings, Josie and Derek (perhaps Noel, between them and the two “older brothers” in terms of age, inhabits more of a grey area here). By all appearances, the same kinds of opportunities did not exist for them, in terms of what Josie would call “self-definition” along cultural lines. They did, of course, embrace opportunities for “self-definition”; but this was not a part of their experience growing up in Artane – or at least, not a part of this in so far as it was a social experience involving peers – and rather something they did in relative isolation from the social circles they grew up around; processes that were only fully unleashed when they had the chance to ‘spread their wings’: going to university, moving away from home, and so on.

Would it be reasonable, then, to suggest that the reasons why it occurred to Josie and Derek to take such routes of “self-definition” – processes which the social world of growing up in Artane certainly did not lay the ground for – might have had something to do with their consciousness of a different experience of cultural “self-definition” than they might otherwise have experienced, via their older brothers, they more initiated in the world of subcultures that used to be more prevalent? (Josie and Derek finding themselves in a somewhat unusual situation in terms of ‘generation gap’ within their family: there is a difference of seventeen years between Josie, the youngest, and the eldest sibling in the family.)

If this is accepted, then, on this vista can be seen both:

⇒ a snapshot of the connection between youth subcultures of an outwardly more ‘CCCS’ lineage, and counter cultures, such as those toward which Josie, Derek and Noel have gravitated (in that the ‘radicalism’ of their older brothers, thoroughly bound up in their involvement in youth subcultural “scenes”, served as a reference point for the younger siblings in the processes of “self-definition” which brought them towards “grassroots” culture);

⇒ and evidence that in spite of the apparently ‘tribal’ parameters of the youth subcultures in which Josie and Derek’s older brothers were involved, they could be viewed not just in

isolation from one another, but as in some ways constituting parts of a greater whole – a youth-subcultural world – within which young people could choose different identities, but which was united by a common orientation towards presenting opportunities for escaping the rubrics of mainstream culture, as well as by certain common cultural reference points, such as, in the above data, certain recreational drugs (for better or for worse), and the 'crossover' dance music culture of the turn of the 1980s and 1990s decades.<sup>103</sup>

Could this picture of unity both in diversity, and in the will to escape the rubrics of mainstream culture and to “self-valorize” through the elaboration of new cultural forms, be interpreted as an *anti*-hegemonic moment within the 'youth-subcultural world' in question? A 'field' which I would connect to the 'unfinished cultural revolution' of the twentieth century?

And if there *is* a connection between these fields and the more overtly 'counter' cultures toward which Josie, Derek and Noel have gravitated, is there also an anti-hegemonic dimension to the latter?

We might consider what Josie has to say about the difference between “grassroots”, and non-“grassroots” culture:

DD: [...] When you were talking about grassroots things, and the grassroots movement and stuff, one of the words you used to describe it was “alternative”, yeah?

Josie: Yeah.

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103 Josie mentions “all that hard house, dance, Happy Mondays, sort of thing, that was coming in”; the reference points she cites here were all, in fact, different aspects of a moment in music culture defined by its eclecticism. Emanating primarily from the UK, and with a notable centre of gravity in Manchester (or “Madchester” as it was dubbed in this context), this moment was emblemized by bands such as the Happy Mondays and fellow Mancunians the Stone Roses (sometimes pigeonholed as part of a genre labelled “baggy”), who made a massive impact on a generation of young people. Both bands, in different ways, were distinguished by their melding of 'dancier' beats and grooves – the new additions to music culture introduced by the pure rave/ 'acid house'/ ecstasy scenes of the late eighties, as well as by 'black' music – with the hooks, riffs and melodies of classic pop, rock and guitar music.



DD: So, would you see a connection between “alternative” politics – like, grassroots politics and the grassroots movement, or whatever – would you see a connection between that and “alternative” music, or “alternative” social scenes, or “alternative” culture or popular culture?

Josie: [...] I think it's more open-minded [...]. Because I'd have friends who wouldn't be in the grassroots network, and they seem under more pressure to dress a certain way, and – now, [...] there is a certain amount of pressure in grassroots things, like, if you don't know this, then you're thick, you know, but it seems like [outside “grassroots” culture] there's a lot more pressure to get the latest trends and know what's going on in showbiz, and I think there's less pressure on people in the grassroots network to, just, conform, because the whole thing about it is not conforming; I think there's less pressure on people to just follow like sheep. So I think it's definitely different from other social networks, in that sense [...]

But if there is something vaguely anti-hegemonic about this, so what? The reason that I discussed these points was because the tension between orientations toward *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* was starting to seem like an increasingly central problem vis-a-vis the constitution of oppositional projects. Associations of *Gemeinschaft* with the problem of closure can be a factor in the move towards *Gesellschaft*, but at the same time the organic, effervescent qualities associated with *Gemeinschaft* seem like an essential source of dynamism for oppositional projects to draw upon – even their lifeblood. I suggested that perhaps, the problem of closure was not necessarily an indivisible feature of *Gemeinschaft*, so much as a feature of *Gemeinschaft* realised in quasi-hegemonic terms; that this could be seen as a factor in the failure of “alternative”, “autonomist” and “counter” cultures in Europe and America from the 1960s onwards to break out of their 'pillarised' or ghettoised social envelopes. So I wondered whether oppositional counter cultures could be realised in an *anti-hegemonic*, as opposed to *counter-hegemonic* way, and thus successfully struggle against the problem of closure; and I asked whether the seeds of such an 'anti-hegemony' could be found within counter culture, or within the legacies of the 'unfinished cultural revolution', of which I see counter culture to be a part. In due course, I have suggested that, yes, whispers of such anti-hegemonic currents can be found on this landscape. But where does that leave us? After all, surely those robust

but ultimately growth-constrained counter cultures in the US, in Italy and in Germany had similar elements, which ultimately did not stop them from succumbing to the problem of closure?

But just as there is more than one way of thinking about culture – something I emphasised when I wondered whether the concept of culture *must* have such hegemonic connotations as I think it often does – there is more than one way to think of counter cultures.

### **Visions of counter culture**

In an earlier draft of this chapter, when I was listing examples of the large and robust counter cultures that nonetheless succumbed to closure and pillarisation, I included alongside the alternative and autonomist scenes in Italy and Germany the anarchist counter culture that flourished in parts of Spain up to its crushing defeat at the end of the Civil War. I knew that this would be an unusual and controversial comparison, but I thought it to be justified: what, after all, was this Spanish counter culture, other than a larger, more established, further-reaching and more successful (until bloody defeat) version of what existed in certain Italian and German cities, drawing on broader social roots? A counter culture that, likewise, grew to impressive dimensions, but could ultimately not transcend the horizons of its strongholds – the Spanish anarchists, after all, being ultimately unable to spread their social revolution outside the anarchist heartlands of certain parts of urban and rural Spain.

But upon further reflection, I think that there *was* a major difference. (I will try a little harder here than to simply point out that what existed in Spain was different because it was a “genuine mass movement”, or that it was “genuinely rooted in working class life”; I do not think that such observations would tell us very much in this context.) I think that what existed in Spain, and what existed in Italy and Germany, were comparable in that they both meet the definition of counter culture that I laid out in the first chapter of this

thesis: a movement or dynamic of cultural innovation unfolding in some sort of dialogue with an oppositional politics. But in other respects the ways in which they are counter cultural contrast. So far in my discussion, the concept of counter culture has been strongly equated with *Gemeinschaft*, and with tribalism. This, I think, is justified in light of the counter cultures seen in Germany, Italy and the US, etc. If all counter cultures have both a 'political' and a 'cultural' moment, it would be stretching it to say that in these contexts, the 'political' moments were dominated by the 'cultural' ones. But I do think it would be fair to say that the 'cultural' moments in question enjoyed a great degree of *autonomy* from the 'political' moments: the movement of cultural innovation was let loose so that new ways of life could be elaborated in their own right.

What about the Spanish counter culture? It too involved a 'movement of cultural innovation': under its aegis, values and attitudes towards (what we would call) such matters as gender, sexual politics, food politics, alcohol and tobacco consumption, to name but a few, became contested and re-worked. While it is hard to know how widespread any of this cultural change was, we do know that within the anarchist culture, currents emerged, for example, rejecting the practices of drinking, of smoking, of engaging prostitutes, of eating meat (Bookchin 1998). And contributing towards the building of *Gemeinschaft* in a very tangible sense, links of anarchist familiarity were naturalised in certain areas (such as the staunchly anarchist hilltop *pueblos* of Andalucia) with the emergence of what Bookchin (1998) calls "anarchist dynasties".

This is not to mention the broader process of cultural change whereby anarchist principles appeared to warren themselves right through the rationalities of the communities which came to comprise the anarchist heartlands: primarily in cities such as Barcelona and Saragossa, and in rural areas around Aragon, Catalonia and Andalucia – leading to explicit popular rejections in those areas of the principles of social hierarchy, of deference, of the privileges of the ruling classes and of the church, and even of the moral and spiritual hegemony of the church (Bookchin 1998; Brennan 1960). Actually – reflecting enduring anarchist preoccupations locating the roots of anarchist principles in the fabric of 'actually-existing' social life, and in the human condition – this process

probably had less to do with people absorbing the teachings of anarchism, and more to do with the letting loose of the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian values already present, but subordinated, within certain spheres of Spanish culture (Bookchin 1998), facilitated by the anarchist 'war of position'. Thus, in many ways, the anarchist movement – or, the anarchist counter culture – probably took its key from, and was shaped by, the insurgent sensibility within elements of 'organic' Spanish plebeian culture.

Does this relative autonomy of the 'cultural' moment of the Spanish anarchist counter culture parallel that of the more recent counter cultures? In a sense, perhaps. But in important ways, these experiences diverge. While the Spanish counter culture may have taken its key from very organic, *Gemeinschaft* currents, the matrix for its elaboration was in large part made up by the formal institutions of the Spanish anarchist movement. This leaning on *Gesellschaft*-type structures may show a rather different way in which a counter culture can be constituted, from that seen in certain other cases. As Bookchin (1998) details, adult education and literacy projects existed alongside libertarian schools for children. An anarchist press abounded, from local to national level, from news-sheets to theoretical reviews. The organisational nodes of the Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo (CNT), the anarchist trade union (periodically the biggest labour body in the country), would become the venue for theoretical, ethical and philosophical dialogues – the process by which values and attitudes were re-shaped. In summer 1936, on the cusp of civil war and revolution (and knowing it), it was at the CNT's famous Saragossa conference that delegates took the opportunity to discuss such topics as how sexual politics might work in the wake of a revolutionary situation. (Bookchin tells us that, amongst other things, the question of "free love" was debated.) And social and cultural life came to be organised around anarchist hubs, a use to which much of the CNT's property was put. Moreover, while the Communists emphasised the impersonal nature of collective action, the anarchists emphasised community – reflected in the communist predilection, officially imposed from above, for terms such as *camarade* (comrade), and the anarchist usage of the much more familiar *companero* (Bookchin 1998). Indeed, the term "affinity group" is an inheritance from the Spanish movement.

The point of all this is not that no other oppositional movement had ever tried to build an oppositional culture and community around its formal institutions. An extensive working class 'radical' press existed in nineteenth century England that was anything but narrowly political; in Connolly's time, the ITGWU devoted considerable resources into making union buildings and union-owned parkland available for the convivial purposes of its members (O'Connor 1992); before Fascist rule, the Turin communists had initiated workers' education projects (Kolakowski 1978);<sup>104</sup> before the Nazi takeover, the German communists of the KPD had built up an extensive working class 'counter culture' around social and cultural institutions (Fischer 1996). And the 'counter cultural' wing of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century nationalist movement in Ireland – the archipelago around “cultural nationalism” – was buttressed in the very *Gesellschaft* institutions of the Gaelic Athletic Association, the National Literary Theatre, the cultural nationalist press, and so on.

Rather, the point is that around this dialectic of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* in the Spanish context, a *revolutionary* counter culture was able to develop. The revolutionary nature of this counter culture is also a large part of the reason that Spanish history includes a civil war – as opposed to a straightforward fascist or quasi-fascist takeover, as in Italy and Germany. For as impressive and extensive as the communist counter cultures in Germany, and to some extent Italy, were, they showed themselves to be utterly incapable of putting up a fight when challenged by the counter-offensives of the Right, and went into hibernation. In Spain, the anarchist movement spearheaded the effort to stop this from happening (Beevor 1982), and a civil war ensued.

It is, of course, easy to argue that by virtue of the fact that the Spanish anarchist counter culture resisted counter-revolution, and responded with revolution, they were more revolutionary than other oppositional formations that could be called, in a sense, 'counter cultures'. But what does this mean on a deeper level? *How* were they more revolutionary? Were the Spanish anarchists braver? Had they stockpiled more guns? Could they shoot better?

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104      Though perhaps not to the same extent as their anarchist counterparts (see Levy 1999).

I think that what made the Spanish counter culture revolutionary was the fusion it achieved between 'politics' and 'culture'. Many commentators have remarked that in the anarchist heartlands of civil war-era Spain, it grew difficult to tell anarchist 'politics' or 'philosophy', and the rationalities of ordinary folk, apart (Bookchin 1998; Brennan 1960; Orwell 1966). Of course, this is the facet of classical Spanish anarchism that has allowed various Marxist commentators to write it off (e.g. Hobsbawm 1959) – seeing the Spanish movement as nothing more than the expression of the “backward-looking” and “millenarian” recalcitrance of essentially peasant rationalities to the march of history.

But I think we are dealing with something different. Gramsci argued that movements that fail to achieve an effective equilibrium between the theoretical planes of intellectual elites, and the rationalities of “simple folk” – what I think could also be framed as the equilibrium between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* – also fail in their revolutionary projects; that an organic and reflexive relationship is required between the level of commonsense rationality within a movement, and the level of theory. Could it be that this is where the Spanish anarchist counter culture succeeded? That the equilibrium it achieved between, on the one hand, the *Gesellschaft* of movement institutions and spaces for more or less formal dialogue and debate, and, on the other hand, the *Gemeinschaft* of the cultural 'clay' that it had to work with, allowed for the elaboration of a revolutionary consciousness armoured against the kind of atrophy seen in, say, the context of the German KPD 'counter culture'? Thus, even when the leadership of the CNT dithered – as leaderships do – for example, during the counter-revolution of the May Days in Barcelona, the rank and file of the CNT militias could be relied upon to be out in the streets, ready for battle (and, eventually, defeat), leading from below.

This is the lesson that comes out of a comparison between the Spanish anarchist counter culture and the communist 'counter cultures' of sorts seen in Germany before Nazism, and in Italy before fascism. The lesson emerging from a comparison of the Spanish case and the more recent counter cultures in, say, Germany and Italy, is the converse. While Gramsci warned of the dangers of letting the theoretical activities of intellectual elites

develop autonomously from the rationalities of “simple folk” – of letting 'philosophy' run away from 'commonsense' – he also made no bones about the limitations of any commonsense formation that was not fortified with rivets of philosophy; such a field would be doomed to incoherent and fragmentary perspectives. I think that this critique of “commonsense” could be extended to the 'tribalism' of counter cultural fields that have been cultivated outside the kind of *Gesellschaft* matrix found in the Spanish context.

Could we not say that in the tribal proclivities of counter cultural elements towards elaborating their own ways of doing things – from activist 'actionism', to squatting, to particular ways of running a meeting, to funny haircuts, to the “structures of feeling” (Williams 1965) implicated in the ways that people talk to and deal with others – a parallel exists to the problems of commonsense as identified by Gramsci? On this vista we might include inabilities to organise beyond short-term, “pragmatic” goals, or to think strategically; and (as any cultural 'habitus' entails its own culturally-specific version of commonsense) the 'closing in' of the horizons of what become culturally-specific, commonsense rationalities, to exclude those who have not been initiated into the tribe. In the paralysis preventing counter cultural formations from effectively transcending these problems, could we not see a victory of the *Gemeinschaft* model of cultural innovation – the tribal model – over that which involves a much more balanced dialectical interplay of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*? This is, I think, something like the model of cultural innovation that Gramsci was elaborating when he talked about effectively relating intellectual and commonsense planes of thought – and, the model of cultural innovation exemplified, I think, in the process by which anarchist principles and popular rationalities melded in parts of civil war and pre-civil war Spain, to produce the most far-reaching social revolutionary movement in the recent history of this part of the world.

In light of all this, how to move forward from the impasse over what is, in a sense, the tension between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* orientations within the movement of movements today?

Discussing the traditional weaknesses of subversive enterprises in Italian life (whatever their politics), Gramsci (1971:204) highlighted their voluntaristic and “*déclassé*” nature. In that they “have never or almost never represented homogeneous social blocs” (Gramsci 1971:203-204), Gramsci viewed them as the “equivalent of gypsy bands or nomads” (Gramsci 1971:204). In their sometimes inability to break out of their pillarised or ghettoised social envelopes and relate their activities to the concerns of broader social constituencies, and in their sometimes inability to realise political protest as something more than a ritual of “actionsism” or even of lifestyle choice, it is easy to see many of the counter cultural formations, and the activist tribes considered in this thesis, in such terms. However, it ought to be remembered that Gramsci had other fish to fry in penning these words. Here, Gramsci's communist peer Bordiga is singled out for criticism, under the codename 'Gottlieb':<sup>105</sup>

The position of Gottlieb was precisely similar to that of the Action Party [of Mazzini and Garibaldi], i.e. of a gypsy or nomad kind. His interest in the trade unions was extremely superficial, and polemical in origin – not systematic, not organic and coherent, not directed towards social homogeneity but paternalistic and formalistic. (Gramsci 1971:204)

If we change a few things around, I think these words make useful food for thought vis-a-vis the converse problem to that of the counter cultural gypsies – that of the political 'volunteers' who renounce ties to counter culture and to *Gemeinschaft*, and strive to make their efforts more *Gesellschaft* – or perhaps, more “class struggle”. In the process, however, they cut themselves off from what (ironically) Gramsci might have called 'organic social homogeneity', but what could also be called the layers of *Gemeinschaft* that constitute the lifeblood of any revolutionary project. Thus, in so doing, these 'volunteers' also become gypsies, albeit of a different sort.

Of course, the “social homogeneity” from which these gypsies cut themselves off is not the “social homogeneity” spoken of by Gramsci; it is the deeply problematic

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105 A literal translation of Bordiga's first name, Amadeo, as pointed out by the editors in Gramsci (1971:204).



homogeneities – or rather, lines of closure – of counter cultural tribes, the limiting nature of which is precisely the *reason* these gypsies have sought to cut themselves loose. But perhaps these counter cultures are part of a wider phenomenon – what I have called an 'unfinished cultural revolution' – and perhaps the lines of closure hide affinities with other socio-cultural spheres. Amidst the tribalism of 'actually-existing' counter culture, these may not have been successfully uncovered. But perhaps if the habitat of counter cultures and oppositional movements could be reconfigured – say, in autonomous spaces liberated from the control of market and state – the tribalism of counter cultures could be tamed, as *Gemeinschaft* might be reconfigured around structures of *Gesellschaft*, a little like what happened in Spain, and where the superficial cultural closures could cease to matter so much and even be transformed into new, inclusive, anti-hegemonic cultures. Could these, then, not transcend the problem of closure and expand potentially infinitely, united by no other 'hegemony' than the revolutionary and emancipatory values elaborated and consented to in the new spaces?

Would the elaboration of new, semi-organised counter cultures, not be particularly pertinent in a social context where existing social, cultural and class identities are coming apart at the seams? Would it not be reasonable to suggest that in our era of precarisation and so on, when we talk about “working class” and “middle class” interests, we are often talking more about cultural and ideological alignments than ones than economic ones? That where “class” attitudes exist that are antagonistic toward questions of social change, they are in fact more reflective of cultural and ideological factors than of socio-economic reality?

If the question, then, must turn on how people may be encouraged to disaffiliate from such alignments, then might it not be reasonable to factor counter cultural endeavours into such an equation? Counter cultural developments have, apparently out of nowhere, caused such schisms in the past – before, alas, being pacified. Perhaps semi-organised counter cultures, hitting the right balance between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, could go further.

What new types of identities would, or should, emerge from such endeavours? If we take the 'political volunteers' described above – perhaps broadly equatable with Hardt and Negri's (2000:413) celebrated figure of “the militant” *a la* Francis of Assisi – as the closest contemporary parallel to Gramsci's “gypsies and nomads”, then perhaps the figure of the pirate might be a closer fit with which to re-designate the other kind of “gypsie” described above; affiliate to an elective, oppositional culture of disaffiliates from mainstream society – oppositional, but not very good at reproducing or naturalising its opposition; weaving its own culture over time, but remaining elective, and marginal. But the meanings associated with the pirate identity can be powerful – as it was for the thousands of youths who, in their diffuse, autonomist resistance to the discipline of Nazi life (as well as the discipline of the occupying powers, post-Nazism) identified themselves as *Edelweiss Piraten*, forging an arena for grassroots impulses towards freedom in the wake of the organised Left's collapse in Germany. In keeping with the orientation towards disaffiliation, some of the *Piraten* were locally and colloquially known as 'Navajo', anticipating another wave of Euro-Native Americanism, in Italy just about four decades later. These “Metropolitan Indians” numbered many thousands of “working class” and “middle class” young people who rejected the rubrics of mainstream culture and society, and were at the centre of a hegemonic crisis. Eventually their movement was pacified amidst crushed hopes, and floods of cheap, hard drugs. But I think these Indians, and these Pirates, emblematised the enduring impulses toward cultural and social revolution, to which radicals might turn in bids to organise the disaffiliation from hegemony – sending smoke signals inviting others to disaffiliate, on street corners through RTS's, across the airwaves through summit protest spectacles, at gigs organised in non-profit venues, in communities, joining in and initiating endeavours to decolonise, inch-by-inch, contemporary life from the control of market and state, building up autonomous spaces and liberated zones and engaging in solidarity with others, encouraging them, as the Zapatistas do, not to look for leadership but to lead themselves, with help and solidarity, towards their own decolonisation.

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